

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

12 AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE FUR TRADER'S DISCOVERY



AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

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The Fur Trader's Discovery or The Brotherhood of Thieves

By Colonel Spencer Dair.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

HINKLEY BRADFORD—The secret leader of the Brotherhood of Thieves, an organization of outlaws, who preyed upon the decent citizens and fur trappers around Wager Inlet, Keewatin territory, British North America. Hink Bradford is that menace to society, a veiled outlaw. He ran his band of thugs "under cover." How he ran his career of blood and crime, to fall before the strange appearance on earth of the trapper he thought he had ordered murdered, is a strange story of things veiled in the grave.

ADRIAN BRADFORD—The beautiful daughter of the arch-hypocrite and outlaw leader, Hink Bradford. Adrian knew nothing of her father's criminal life, and how she was marooned on the bleak shores of Hudson Bay, and just escaped with her life, is a story of mystery. Blonde, fair-haired, blue-eyed, she won her way back to life and happiness in a manner that excites wonder for her escape borders almost upon the supernatural.

CAPTAIN JIM WAHPETON—There is one thing sure, and that is that the active head of the Brotherhood of Thieves, Cap Jim, richly deserved the horrible fate that overtook him, when he tried to continue his career of blood and crime in the musk-ox district in the Barren Lands of British North America.

TZINTZONTZAN—An Eskimo bandit. He reaped the whirlwind which his career of crime had made his due, and lies dead in the strange unchanging solitude of the famous Barren Lands, surrounded by a mystery that can never be lifted.

THREE FINGERED JACK—Can men come back from the grave? Do murdered men mow and gibber and call for retribution upon the heads of those who figured in their deaths? That is a question! How it was placed before Three Fingered Jack, and how he met the problem—that is a matter for consideration in the on-coming pages.

PIERCE GIFFORD—A fur-buyer and fur-grader in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company, at the hamlet of Grave Yard Point, British North America. He first became convinced of the murder of his friend and employee, Three Fingered Jack, through finding certain bloody marks upon a peltry of a marten which he happened to know must have come from fur-skins stolen from the trapper. How he followed the clue, and what it led to is worth reading.

ORSON HUBBARD—The assistant to Pierce Gifford, and who aided him in his mission of trampling the terrible Brotherhood of Thieves into the ground. There is a sense of humor in this young man, but he did not shirk the many dangers that his devotion to his friend thrust upon him.

BLUE WING—A Chipewyan Indian. He aided in the uprooting of the Brotherhood of Thieves until his eyes closed in death, the victim of the secret assassination methods of the gang scourge of outlaws that wide in its ramifications swept over peaceable British North America until its career ended in the Barren Lands.

OLD KATE—An Eskimo servant in the home of Hink Bradford.

CHAPTER I.

A CRIMSON WITNESS.

Pierce Gifford stared at the marten skin he held in his hands.

The fur was glossy and of value. But Gifford was not thinking of the fur.

His puzzled eyes were sharp upon a broad, splotchy of fur in a death agony."

crimson smear on the half-tanned inner skin of the valuable bit he held.

"It looks like blood," whispered Gifford to his companion, Orson Hubbard.

"It is blood," grimly replied his friend, after a careful examination.

"It looks to me as if some one had grasped this bit

"Y-e-s—it does look so. I see a faint, sort of a shadowy outline of two fingers."

Gifford gasped when he heard the words.

The marks, faint as they were, indicated that they were made by the right hand.

Gifford placed the fingers of his right hand in the splashy marks.

The index finger fitted one of the marks; then came the ring finger; but there was no mark made by a middle finger.

Orson Hubbard turned to his companion with his face aflame with suspicion.

"Only two fingers show," he cried. "Who is there that we know with the middle finger of his right hand missing?"

"Three Fingered Jack, the Fur-trapper," replied Pierce. "He made that sign in blood on that skin."

The two stalwart young men looked meaningly at each other.

"When did Three Fingered Jack leave this place?" asked Hubbard.

Gifford took down a book. He consulted it carefully.

"I gave Three Fingered Jack his 'debt' money on March 1st a year ago," Gifford said at length. "Then he said he was going fishing first and later was going trapping further North from here."

"Debt money" was the usual advance made to trappers by the Hudson's Bay Company, the great fur-buying company of the North-West country that makes up British North America.

The "debt" gave the trapper funds for the replenishing of his outfit, and stood against him until he returned from trackless wilds with his winter's work in peltries, which he sold to the company, and after his debt was paid off received the difference in cash.

Gifford was lost in thought for some time after he had consulted his books.

"This matter looks queer to me," he continued. "Here it is June of a—say, man, Three Fingered Jack has been gone fifteen months. Why——"

"He ought to have been back by last May anyway," cried Orson. "Man, don't you see it all? Three Fingered Jack is dead! That sign in crimson is the witness he imprinted on that peltry before he died, to tell of his murder."

"Murder?" cried Pierce. "Old chap, that's an ugly word."

"And it means an uglier deed," rejoined Orson. "Pierce, there's no question in my mind that Three Fingered Jack will never come back to settle his debt. He has been murdered."

Pierce Gifford stared out of the open door to the one-storied log store-house and office of the Hudson's Bay Company, in the village of Grave Yard Point, Keewatin territory, British North America.

The hamlet clung to the rocky forest covered shores of Wager Inlet, the strait-like bay at the Northern end of Hudson Bay, which runs into that part of the bay known as Rowes Welcome.

Gifford and Bradford were "graders and buyers" for the Hudson's Bay Company.

It was their business to purchase peltries of fur-trappers, "grade" them and ship them by Hudson Bay to Fort Churchill.

The post was a lonely one because all that caused Grave Yard Point to be in existence was the presence

of Gifford and Hubbard in the bleak inhospitable place, and the business that they brought there when trappers came in from the wilds to sell furs.

Grave Yard Point had a saloon or two, a few scattered houses, a dance-hall, and that was about all.

As all business depended upon the trapper who visited the hamlet to sell goods to the Hudson's Bay Company, represented by Pierce Gifford, and as only at certain times each year did the trappers visit the hamlet, half the time trade was roaring; half the time the town was off the commercial map.

Pierce Gifford was a first-class "grader."

A glance told him whether fur peltries were to go into light, pale-dark, medium, or dark classification, and as each class had a separate price to be paid to the trapper, it can be readily said that a good grader can make real money for his employers, or can lose much for them; upon him at the firing line is the classification detail placed.

Not only must he save money for the company by "good grading," but he must not try to take all of it by arbitrarily grading so close that there is nothing left for the trapper. He must be fair both ways.

It was the last six words that stamped Gifford as one of the best graders in the North-West.

When he shipped his purchases to Fort Churchill, it was invariably found that while he might have paid a little more than other graders scattered all over the fur-bearing animal districts, that he had, after all, got in a better and more money making line for the company than any other man, and the trappers with whom he had dealt were better satisfied with their end of the sale.

Each side had made equally a good result; so Pierce Gifford was a favorite with trappers and company.

It was said that so great a favorite was he that not one of the trappers with whom he made a "debt" ever defaulted in paying it in furs.

Here, however, Pierce Gifford saw was a flaw in his career.

Three Fingered Jack had not come back to pay up his "debt."

Gifford had lost, so far, all the money advanced him, no small item by the way, for this time Three Fingered Jack had laid in an entire new outfit of expensive steel-traps, and of the requisites for a fishing and hunting campaign.

It was a sore spot in the mind of Gifford from the moment that he remembered the absentee—then there was the silent crimson witness.

Had Three Fingered Jack been murdered? Or was he defaulter for his debt? Was the fur that bore the evidence that the bloody hand of the dead man had pressed it, an accidental matter? Or was it one of those queer things that at times indicate a crime and begin the long chain which has to be forged link-by-link until the murderer is arrested?

These thoughts flew like lightning through the brain of Pierce Gifford.

Orson Hubbard, who assisted him in the work for the Hudson's Bay Company, watched his friend as he strode back and forth with a brooding moody look on his face.

Both men were tall, broad-shouldered, and alert with health and great strength.

Both were smooth-shaven, brown-haired, brown-eyed, and with regular, tanned features.

In general appearance they were of a type that seems to grow like the primeval forest in which they lived; tall, straight, comely, and with each a family resemblance to the other.

"Fur Traders from British North America," any observer in Timbuctoo, for instance, would have ticketed each young man, after one long stare at them.

This type of the great stretches, the high mountains, the splendid air, the wholesome freedom of the wild life in which they lived, is rapidly being pushed backward by the college-man type of civilization, where each youth is moulded into an exact counterpart of another college youth, and while all may survive, not many stray out to the frontier where Gifford and Hubbard cast their lot.

"It looks to me as if Three Fingered Jack was dead," finally summed up Pierce. "I have been trading with him for ten years and he never has forgotten his debt. If he was alive he would be back; if he hasn't come back he is dead."

The logical summing up of the case appealed to Orson.

"You are right, I am sure," Orson replied. "In my mind there is no question that Three Fingered Jack is dead. That crimson stain told its tale to me immediately."

"It is *The Fur Trader's Discovery*," moodily replied Pierce.

"No question of that. Did you stop to think of another phase of this matter?"

"Another phase? What do you mean?"

"Don't you see, Pierce, that we have got the beginning of a tangled skein of facts and suspicion in our hands?"

"N-o-o. I don't—see—as I—do."

The reply came slowly.

Orson bristled up like a savage elk.

"Pierce," he said, "you see all right? Don't think that you don't. Let me ask you one question?"

"Go ahead."

"From whom did you buy the marten skin which bears the bloody finger marks?"

Pierce held up his hand as if to shield himself from a blow. His attitude was that of a man who knew this question was coming, and he hated to have it put to him.

"It came in with a lot of furs I bought and graded this morning," Pierce replied.

"Ah! Then as the purchase was made so recently you can tell me quickly from whom you made the purchase?"

"I can."

"From whom did you make the purchase?"

"From Hinkley Bradford."

The explosion of the hut or log store-house in which the two men stood and the resulting hurling of everything skyward would not have surprised Orson more than this reply.

"From Hink Bradford?"

"Yes."

"From the richest man in Grave Yard Point?"

"Exactly."

Orson sat down and breathed hard.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Dead sure. That marten skin bearing the bloody

finger marks was sold to me early this morning in a general lot of furs by Hink Bradford. I remember there was a couple of dozen wolf-skins, quite a lot of rabbit pelts, a silver-gray fox, two prime red-foxes, some muskrat, otter and mink-skins, and what seemed odd to me at the time only this single marten pelt."

"What did you give for the lot?"

"Market rates. They were all pretty good peltries. The silver-gray fox skin was about the only rare thing in the lot. I gave up five hundred bones for that—it was a good big price up here, but shipped to any fur-house in the United States or Canada it would be worth fifteen hundred or two thousand dollars."

"Gee! That was a find."

"Yes. There's been only about one hundred silver-gray fox peltries taken in the North-West, the Hudson's Bay Company Postmaster at Fort Churchill writes me, this last year. It will be worth at least three thousand dollars laid down in the London market."

"Well, you made a good purchase, and tell me, old chap, how is it that Hink Bradford made the sale to you?"

"Hink's the only rival I have out here. He is an infernal Jew money-lender in Christian form. He advances money for half the crooked things that are pulled off in this territory."

"So I hear."

"When I was away last winter for three months the young chap who took my place got tangled up with him."

"How?"

"He put over a lot of doctored skins and got them graded in for good peltries and then after he had got his cash, and my substitute had got next and told him that he had purchased by sample and the goods were not up to the sample, Hink laughed and said the 'Hudson's Bay Company was rich enough to stand a loss or two.'"

"Humph! Hink wouldn't make the loss good?"

"Not much. Said the company ought not send a green-horn out here to do grading and buying."

"That's how you got next to the fact that Hink sold you the skin, eh?"

"If you mean the one with the bloody finger marks on it—yes."

"Why are you so sure?"

"When I do business with Hink, after what I've told you, I look pretty carefully into the peltries—I want to know whether the fur is thick, glossy, of good color, in fact of the kind that I ought to buy, you know. There's some men I deal with who require me only to say, 'goods all right'? and if I get 'yes' I don't have to grade up carefully. But there's others that when I buy I put on spectacles to grade with—they are the Hink Bradford kind."

"Nice gentleman, is Hink?"

"Think so?"

"Over my left shoulder. When I see that dirty snake, I cross my fingers and spit over them—he has the hoodoo brand in his very walk."

"He's a crooked gent, all right."

"Know much about him?"

"No one does. He lives in the outskirts of the town in a little adobe shack with his daughter Adrian, as pretty a blue-eyed, golden-haired girl of twenty-two years as you ever saw in your life."

"That's right. I've seen her. She's too nice a girl to have such a father."

"Well, Hink lives, Lord only knows how. He seems to have money—lots of it. He always has gold, or silver, or a diamond, or peltries for sale. Yet he has no apparent connection with anything that can produce gold, or silver, or diamonds, or peltries."

"Well! Well!"

"He is a sort of crooked-man's usurer, it seems to me. He seems to know all the gun-men, outlaws, bandits, thieves, crooks, Heaven knows what kind of other crooked gentry that this part of the world affords."

"Hum."

"He has no office. He establishes himself in Sioux City Jim's saloon in the hamlet of Grave Yard Point, where he carouses in his own sweet way, but if there's a burglary, a hold-up, a theft, a missing trapper, whose valuable furs sooner or later seem to come to our market—well, have I not said enough?"

"You have. When you spoke of missing trappers, and valuable furs coming after all to a market, through the hands of Hink Bradford, you set me thinking a trifle."

Pierce Gifford shrugged his shoulders.

"I've been watching Hink Bradford and his pretty daughter for some time," he hissed. "It's about time for me to even up the deal in furs he put over on our company. I fancy this trip that the fur bearing the crimson finger marks is the beginning of a thread that will wind up Hink Bradford and *The Brotherhood of Thieves* I feel sure he represents."

"Shake on that, Pierce!" cried Orson Hubbard. "It's time we wound up Hink Bradford and his gang of thugs."

The two men clasped hands.

It was a compact that they knew meant bloody death for some one sooner or later.

Would either young man be the victim?

CHAPTER II.

IN SEARCH OF EVIDENCE.

A month later Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard were face to face with the mystery of the finger marks.

It was early in July and the party with Blue Wing, a Chipewyan Indian, were hurrying to Wager Inlet, where they had heard that Three Fingered Jack had last been seen.

The men were in a stout whaleboat with a little square mast shipped forward.

A tent, cooking utensils, clothing, provisions, plenty of ammunition and seven dogs, to be used in drawing the sled, in the boat, when places where the winter's snow and ice would be met with inland, occasioned their use.

There was plenty of deer-meat, and pemmican aboard for the dogs, and the entire party was in fine fettle.

"Keep out a little more from shore," remarked Pierce to Orson; "even if it is July, there is a lot of floe ice from the Arctic sea floating about near shore. Keep away from it. A little floe ice is a dangerous thing for this whaleboat."

Orson tacked a point off shore.

Then he settled the course of the boat in a diagonal line and turned to Pierce.

"We ought to do pretty well tacking along with this stiff southeast wind behind us, only it may kick up quite a surf before we land—where are we now? Do you know?"

"About thirty-five miles from Wager Inlet. I think that point over to our left is Yellow Bluff."

"Desolate country, isn't it?"

"Very. There isn't much about here that I know of. A Scotch firm has a small trading schooner up on the North side of Wager's Inlet. They employ a lot of native Eskimos, you know, hunting musk ox."

"They do pretty well, eh?"

"You bet they do. Musk ox is as valuable an article of commerce as can be imagined. Its great broad based horns are useful as ivory and the fine hair from the beasts make when woven a fabric softer than silk."

"The Scotch firm are hunting them?"

"You bet they are. They get also walrus, whose skin, tusks, and oil is valuable as can be—the firm is making money, you can rest assured."

"But why was Three Fingered Jack up here so far?"

"You know he said he was going to put in some time walrus fishing, and had added to his kit not only traps for fur trapping further toward Grave Yard Point, but had put in a whaleboat, and a sled and some dogs and was, he told me, coming in some time or other at Wager's Inlet to put in a few months at walrus fishing and at seal fishing—and then after he had sold his fishing catch to the Scotch trading schooner was going to try his hand at musk-ox hunting."

"I see."

"Yes. Three Fingered Jack began to see that in the wilds out here you have got to be as many sided as you have to be in the civilized world. The day has gone by when the boy can come up and live on just one thing that he can do. He must learn to do a lot of things. Then if one line goes back on him there's a lot of other lines ready."

"Three Fingered Jack, therefore, could trap in the fur-animal country up here, fish for seal or walrus in their home, and then when he got beyond the tree limits, and over into the Barren Lands about Wager's Inlet, he could take a shy at musk ox hunting."

"That's just it. You know the musk-ox feed on the saxifrages moss district North of Wager's Inlet, where the moss they love climbs about the rocky barren soil."

"I know, I've seen the moss—it's known here and in the European Alps, and makes good feed here for the ox, eh?"

"Exactly. Now when I gave Three Fingered Jack such a good 'debt,' when I last saw him, was because he wanted to branch out. He had it all figured down that if he could get me to advance him enough cash to get his outfit together it would be a venture that would pay. It took him out of the simple line of a trapper, into the line of a man who could trap, hunt, fish, and all that sort of thing; it broadened his money making power, and as I've been yelling this plan to everyone I meet for years, it all sounded good to me."

"Yes. It's what all must come to in the world of the wild. You can't put all of your eggs in one basket."

"That's true. Now, you see, I was empowered to give a debt to Three Fingered Jack so far as furs were concerned on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company,

but as he desired to sell most of his fishing catch up at Wager's Inlet and not bring it back to our post at Grave Yard Point, I had to make the debt that he needed to buy his whaleboat, sled, dogs and so forth, out of my own pocket."

"Oh, ho!"

"Three Fingered Jack's disappearance touched me nearly in my own pocket and in my official capacity."

"It did, didn't it?"

"So I wrote to the Postmaster at Fort Churchill telling him the entire story."

"Did you?"

"Yes. He sent back the Indian runner I despatched to him with the information that I was to start at once for Wager Inlet and try and locate Three Fingered Jack, he having heard direct from the Inlet that Jack was known to be hunting there last. *He had a silver-gray fox skin with him at the time.*"

Orson almost jumped out of the whaleboat.

"Hink Bradford sold you a *silver-gray fox skin*? he gasped.

"Precisely. This made a pretty broad clue for me, the Postmaster at Fort Churchill wrote. He added that it must not be known that any one could get a debt from the Hudson's Bay Company, and then disappear without an attempt on the part of the company to either arrest the fraud, if he was a fraud, or to avenge him if he had been done away with and his peltries taken by the sneaking outlaws that crop up here often, you know."

Orson nodded.

"The order ended by saying that money was not to be thought of in my search for Three Fingered Jack, and as it was not out of season for trappers to come in to do business with me, I was at liberty to go at once, closing the Grave Yard Point post while I was gone—and it was added that I'd better take you along with me, as it 'was a job that needed two good men.'"

"If it wasn't for this stiff breeze and I'm afraid of dumping us all overboard, I'd get up and bow. Well, chappie, here we are. It took that Indian runner seventeen days to get to Fort Churchill from Grave Yard Point and eighteen days to get back from there, or thirty-five days in all——"

"And ever since then we have been secretly fitting out this expedition pretending that we were going off on a fishing and hunting trip for a few weeks and apparently laying in supplies for such a trip, while really we were planning a much longer trip that needed grave preparation."

"Well, hunting for Three Fingered Jack, trapper, in the Barren Land district above Wager's Inlet isn't a summer day's jaunt."

"But we got away with it. Here we are, and there is plenty of good water all about us, eh?"

"Yes. And look at that shore. Isn't it bleak? Did you ever think there was such a God forsaken spot in British North America?"

"It all does look pretty snowy—say it's July—I'll stump you to go ashore and snow-ball."

"Funny, isn't it? But in this heavy fur suit I'm as warm as can be, but it's funny that it's cold as thunder out here and when we get into shore it's so warm that a fellow can go in his shirt-sleeves almost."

"That's it. You're so far out here that you get the wind it would seem direct from the Arctic Ocean; in

shore the wind don't strike you and Old Sol, our gentleman sun, gets in his work."

Both men began tacking the boat, and all hands were busy for a time.

They at length resumed their conversation.

"This is a pretty nifty boat isn't it?"

"Yes, these whaleboats stand a lot of work. They are sharp forward and square aft, and with a sail forward, and a rudder aft, are wide, roomy, and pretty safe."

"Lucky for us! Being wrecked out here would mean sure death."

"Not a chance in the world left for us. We couldn't get home overland, and with no boat to sail, for mind you Hudson Bay is a pretty stiff bit of water to negotiate, we would starve to death. There isn't any game about here but musk-ox, and polar bear, and with nothing to kill them with, our weapons and ammunition sunk, we would be powerless."

"It behooves us to—ah, well it means that we ah, had better sail pretty darned careful."

"Exactly."

"Do you think that Hink Bradford suspects us?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think he suspects our mission?"

"Hope not."

"Why?"

"If Hink Bradford knew we were after the secret that lays hidden in those blood stained smears on that marten skin which was in the bundle containing the *silver gray fox skin which he sold me*, he would be on our trail in twenty minutes."

"Right."

"If he was on our trail, why, we would have to face the fight of our lives."

"He would murder us."

"Or he would have us murdered."

"By whom?"

Pierce whispered now because he did not want Indian Blue Wing, the Chipewyan, to hear, although he was standing by the mast forward watching the sail swell to the rushing wind, and was out of ear-shot.

"By his gang—*The Brotherhood of Thieves.*"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just what the words imply. I have thought for years that there is a *Brotherhood of Thieves* in Keewatin territory, and that Hink Bradford, the richest man in Grave Yard Point, was in some way the 'fence' that got rid of their ill-gotten plunder—there's been a good many good trappers turn up missing each year, that the chance dangers of this part of the world, I never thought, carried off."

"Hush."

"Why, hush?"

"That's a pretty dangerous thing you've just said. It pretty near implicates the richest man up here with being in league with a lot of men to murder, rob, and sell their plunder to the Hudson's Bay Company."

"That's what I said. That's what I meant. Before we get back, you are going to see that I'm right."

"Perhaps?"

"I know I am right, and I'm going to round up this gang or die in the attempt."

Orson gazed open-mouthed at his companion.

"Well," he replied, "this trip is going to be exciting I see. There's not going to be much that is dull in

it I see. But for Lord's sake, whatever you do, my boy, don't you forget for a single moment that if this boat sinks it's all over for us."

As if the words of Orson had invited the disaster he cautioned against, the boat stopped, shivered as if alive, turned over, until the water poured into it, while the hideous face of a sea-monarch apparently grinned at the three clinging men, and gnashed its long tusks at them.

"A walrus!" howled Pierce. "We have run into an enormous school of walruses. Fight them off boys, or they will tip the boat over!"

As he spoke the bay seemed alive with the walrus, known to the North-West natives as the Sea-Horse.

They were closing in on the whaleboat by thousands as if jointly determined to wreck it and thus end the lives of its three frightened occupants.

CHAPTER III.

HINK BRADFORD SEES A LIGHT.

"What are you doing here—didn't I tell you to keep away from me?"

Hink Bradford growled these words in angry disgust at Tzintzontzan, an Eskimo who was not recognized by the decent Eskimos of the territory.

He was a simple thief all of the time, a thug most of the time, and a murderer for robbery as much of the time as he thought he could get away with it.

"I know," he growled from his stunted height, out of a seamy, wrinkled, dark yellow face, from a mouth that looked like a crack in a side of leather.

"Then why do you come?" demanded Hinkley Bradford.

"Captain Jim Wahpeton, he send. Give myself, n-o-t-e. So!"

The Eskimo presented a note.

Black-bearded, fat, tall, ungainly, black-eyed Hink Bradford was no fool.

Under his swarthy skin beat a brave heart and his skull covered a scheming brain, for being the virtually only leader of a gang of outlaws in Keewatin territory needs brains and courage.

The note was laconic like the writer.

This is what it said:

"Dear Hink—There's trouble brewing. Ask Tzintzontzan. The yellow-skinned thief knows all about it.

"Yours,
"CAPTAIN JIM."

Hink studied the note.

Then he studied the Eskimo.

The two men faced each other in Sioux City Jim's saloon, a dirty, bar-room sacred to North-West loafers.

A plain board did duty as the bar. It rested on two old barrels.

Whiskey and brandy and cigars were all that was sold. It was questionable which was the worse fate, to take a drink of Sioux City Jim's liquor or to smoke one of his cigars.

The faro, roulette, and poker-room lay behind the

bar, and still further behind it was a dance-hall, where Indian women, and white outcasts danced with trappers in the season when the trappers visited the hamlet to sell their furs to the Hudson's Bay Company agent, young Pierce Gifford.

But this was the season when the trappers were away and as the store house of the company was closed now while its young representative was off on a fishing and hunting trip, as he had explained, the dance hall was not in use and the gambling games languished.

Hink led the Eskimo into the deserted dance-room.

"Now cough up," cried Hink, with a singular laugh of hatred against all civilized things, as he hitched his revolver out of the way, where it swung at his belt, and sat down on a bench.

Tzintzontzan stood his beady little eyes blinking with gratified vanity in speaking face to face with so great a man as Hink Bradford.

"I see two men in whaleboat," began the Eskimo.

"Where?"

"By Yaller Bluff."

"Hum."

"When?"

"Two day 'go."

"Were you alone?"

"Um."

"What did you do?"

"Tole' Cap. Jim."

"What else did you tell him?"

"Say, I knew men whaleboat."

"You told him you knew the men in the whaleboat, did you?"

"Um."

"Well, you yellow skinned son of a seal, who were the men in the boat?"

Tzintzontzan smiled as if what he was going to say was very pleasing news.

"Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard," he replied.

He had expected a terrible outbreak from Hink.

But none came. Instead Hink smiled in a way that boded ill for the lives of two young men.

"I thought so," Hink remarked.

"Eh?" queried the Eskimo.

"Never mind. Get on with your story."

"That all."

Then Hink turned questioner.

"Where was the whaleboat in which you saw the men, did you say?"

"Off Yaller Bluff."

"Let me see that point is about thirty-five miles from Wager's Inlet."

"I no know."

"Yes, that much by land. I don't know how far by bay. Well, let's see. Any one else with them?"

"Chipeuyan Injun."

"Oh. Know his name?"

"Um."

"What is it?"

"Blue Wing."

"That's the fellow that helps out in odd jobs about the Hudson's Bay Company post here?"

"Yep."

Hink turned all this information over in his mind. It might be that the presence of the two men he most dreaded just then off Yellow Bluff sailing in a whale-

boat in Hudson Bay with its bow pointed toward Wager Inlet was something that boded ulterior motives.

On the other hand it would be a natural place for Gifford and Hubbard to be in if they were searching for a chance at the musk-ox for the musk-ox just then was browsing on the mosses of the Barren Lands beyond the Inlet.

"They may be not a bit suspicious of me," thought Hink. "They may be suspicious of Jim Wahpeton, the leader in the field of the *Brotherhood of Thieves*, which in reality was engineered by the real head of the *Brotherhood*, Hink Bradford himself, here present and cogitating over this little matter."

The cogitations of Hink came to an end after awhile and he began giving orders to the Eskimo.

"You may get back," Hink added. "Get back to Cap. Jim as soon as you can."

"Yep."

"Tell him to be careful. Tell him to drop things that can't be pulled off under cover while those two chaps are in the territory."

"Yep."

"Tell him that if they are merely on a hunting trip to leave them alone."

The Eskimo nodded.

"If, however, they show they are out to get *us* you tell Jim to get *them* quick!"

The Eskimo winked.

"Tell Cap. Jim the quickest way to get them if they are *after us* is any old way, as long as it hurries them quick in unmarked and secret graves, don't you see?"

The Eskimo smiled.

This was the kind of talk that suited his evil disposition.

"I—tell," said Tzintzontzan with his ferocious smile.

Hink thought further.

"I had better be a little careful," he thought. "That gang is rather too quick on the trigger-finger. They shoot first and ask explanations afterward and some times it's awkward giving the explanations. Well, I'll caution this Eskimo a bit."

Hink then spoke aloud to the Eskimo.

"Let me tell you," he added, "that you want to tell Cap. Jim that I don't want any mistakes made. I don't want no plantin' done unless he can show me."

"Show you, all right."

"You've got to me. You are on. I want you to be careful and not get things mixed. If we plant that Pierce Gifford there'll be trouble with the Hudson's Bay Company sure. You can't be too careful, Tzintzontzan about this message. I don't want any weepins pulled unless it's act'lly necessary and you're dead sure that Gifford and Hubbard are *after us*."

The Eskimo nodded.

"If they are after any one else, don't worry them. Let them get there on any other game. If they are merely simply on a hunting party, don't do a thing to them, help them all you can, and see that they get back safely."

The Eskimo grinned.

"How long before you will get back to the Cap?"

"Three, four day."

"What? Why no white man ever makes the trip under thirty days."

This time the Eskimo laughed. This is rare for Eskimos grin, smile, but do not laugh much.

"I know," he said. "Eskimo trabble fast; white man

no learn Eskimo trabble trick when Eskimo alone."

Hink understood that the Eskimos helped the white man in trackless wilds but did it in the roundabout way of their race; for himself he went to things in a shorter way, and in this particular case Hink knew that in a few days Cap. Jim would get his instructions by the "inside route" which an Eskimo kept as a sealed book from white-folk.

"That's all," cried Hink at length.

As the Eskimo melted away into the distance Hink smiled to himself.

"If Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard are after *us*," Hink smiled, "they are going to have a merry death rather quick. *The Brotherhood of Thieves* must not quake when a Hudson's Bay Company grader, and agent of a tiny trading post, and his assistant take boat for the scenes of our actions—no, not while a revolver can flash and a knife grind to a foe's heart."

The words meant much to Orson Hubbard, and Pierce Gifford.

For now behind them stalked the sneaking assassin!

CHAPTER IV.

A FIGHT WITH SEA-HORSES.

"Try and get out the oars to the boat. We are not able to sail in this sea of sea-horses," cried Pierce Gifford in his loudest tones, when he had looked about him at the amazing spectacle that saluted his eyes.

Hudson Bay was literally alive with the walrus, or sea-horse.

The animals seemed to take up every inch of room so that there was no water about.

There were walruses the size of an ox, some even larger than the greatest ox ever known, cheek by jowl with tiny ones that seemed to be no larger than a kitten, while intermediate sizes were as thick as mosquitoes in some of the Alaskan depths, where they are so thick that they obscure the sun.

The walrus was no unknown animal to the three men in the boat.

It was their numbers that they feared.

"I could walk half away across Hudson Bay on the backs of those walruses," shouted Orson. "If they get fairly under the boat they will tip us over. All then would be lost for they would dodge our bodies and if we could swim ashore from here what would be the use with all our stores lost?"

As he spoke a walrus, whose tusks must have been three feet long, with a loud snort rushed directly at the whaleboat.

Pierce saw the walrus coming and snipped him over the head with an oar. The blow crushed in the head of the walrus and it sank immediately.

The family of seals to which the walrus belongs were never killed with more neatness and dispatch than this monstrous one.

The walrus resembles the seal in general formation of the body and limbs until it comes to its head; then it widely differs.

The walrus' head is remarkable for the enormous development of the canine teeth of the upper jaw and by the tumid appearance of the muzzle caused by the magnitude of their sockets and by the thickness of the upper lip.

These great canine teeth form two tusks directed downwards, and the lower jaw becomes narrow in

front, so as to pass between them. The nostrils as if displaced by the sockets of the tusks, open almost upwards at some distance from the muzzle. The eyes are small, and popularly speaking the creatures have no ears.

The walrus is usually seen in great herds, and they are killed by hunters who wish to get their tusks which in compactness is far superior to elephant tusks, or their oil which like seal-oil is a valuable commercial commodity.

Usually the animals are attacked on land where they come in great herds, or are killed on the ice, but as the animal's hide is so thick that it will resist a rifle bullet fired point-blank, it can only be killed by being assailed with spears.

"We are in trouble for fair," cried Pierce as he pulled out a walrus spear from several in the boat, an action imitated by Orson and Blue Wing. "These walruses are apparently partly bulls and partly female with young. A female walrus is no joke, let me tell you, when it comes to a fight. She has great affection for her young and will defend it to the last extremity. The trouble too in fighting a walrus is that if you kill one the rest of the herd come to its assistance. They fight and kill the fierce white polar bear and are courageous, you bet, and—look out for the big bull over there!"

As he spoke a bull walrus came charging furiously over toward the whaleboat.

It looked as if it would rush it and overturn it and crunch it against the side of an almost equally as large walrus on the opposite side of the boat.

Blue Wing gave a shrill scream of terror.

He thought in his Indian heart that the whaleboat would tip over.

But he was brave if frightened.

The steel-tipped spear went out with a vicious intent from his two strong arms.

The sharp point darted with unerring aim into the eye of the speeding sea-horse.

The point penetrated the animal's brain through its eye and it turned over a heaving, dying mass of hundreds of pounds of flesh and sank while the place where it disappeared was taken by another gigantic beast.

The boat righted itself as the weight of the walrus, who had almost clambered up on it, was released from it, but the walrus on the other side was making an equally ferocious attempt to get into the whaleboat from that direction.

While Orson who had got out the unwieldy oars with which the boat was equipped in an effort to row, which he saw quickly was impossible in the press of the gigantic herd, was trying at all events to make an effort in that direction, Pierce stood up in the boat and whacked the intruder over its nostrils.

The walrus shook its head in dismay and then sheered off, but behind it pressed hundreds upon hundreds of others and the situation after an hour's fighting seemed to be more appalling than when the attack began.

"Say, this is cloying," gasped Pierce, "we are being bombarded by these walruses. The trouble is that when we hit one chap a good clout, all the rest of the bunch come to his funeral. There's getting to be more mourners than there are dead walruses."

"Isn't that so?" wailed Orson. "I've killed a dozen but there's always two waiting to take the deadman's place. Seems to me this reminds me of a job in Mon-

treah—ten men ready for it before the breath is out of the chap that's holding it."

"Heap, damn, too many heap walru'" cried Blue Wing.

"Right you are, Blue Wing," gasped Pierce, "watch me swat this chap."

The "swat" Blue Wing saw was effectual. The walrus would never need another one. Its skull was crushed in by the blow and it sank to rise no more.

"I'll give this big fellow a biff that will settle his hash," shouted Orson on his side of the boat.

The spear-blow put the walrus where no second "biff" was necessary.

"By thunder!" gasped Pierce as he stood erect in the boat, "This can't last forever. I——"

But he said no more.

A walrus that had got under the boat in some way, probably by diving to get away from its fellows, chose to come to the surface just then.

It came up directly under the whaleboat and tilted it at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

This pulled the feet of Pierce out from under him.

With his eyes like oysters, his face writhing in dread and his arms and feet and legs whirling about like an animated monkey-on-a-stick, poor Pierce went floundering overboard directly into the face of the grandfather of all the herd, a fellow who must have weighed a ton or two and whose tusks reached down from his gigantic head so that they disappeared into the depths of the Hudson Bay.

"Good Lord!" yelled Orson, "there goes Pierce overboard. He's a dead man!"

The feelings of Pierce were manifest by the shout he gave as he went overboard.

The feelings of the walrus could only be manifested by his actions.

He gave a snort like an angry whale.

When the head of Pierce hit him fairly between his small, twinkling eyes, with about the same kind of a blow a battering ram would have given, the walrus simply put for deep water.

He may have put up some signal for the remainder of the herd but at all events there was the most wonderful, sudden, and prolonged series of divings on all sides that any herd of walrus had ever engaged in.

Foam was lashed from the waters of the bay, until the scene looked like a seacoast in a high storm.

There was a tremendous flopping.

Then not a walrus as in sight.

"Every one has dived when they saw Pierce come charging overboard," howled Orson. "Where is Pierce, Blue Wing? Do you see him any where?"

The side of the boat sagged the next second.

"Here is Pierce, you blundering idiot," came a spluttering voice. "And no thanks to you at that."

It was Pierce.

He was shivering with cold.

He was wet, bedraggled and although Orson was convulsed with laughter he tried his best to assist his friend and chief into the boat.

"Here, you, stop floundering about like that," ordered Orson. "You are worse than those confounded walruses. I'll have to hit you in the head with an oar or clout you one through the brain soon, if you don't stop struggling. This boat isn't a steamship with a companion-way out for straggling passengers tooting, tooting after it in a tug. It's a whaleboat and

won't stand much four-flushing like you are putting up."

In spite of himself, and in spite of the cold Pierce grinned.

He hung on to the boat and then by aid of Blue Wing and Orson, he was helped aboard.

A quick change of clothing, a good drink from a bottle of brandy, and a little exercise in helping us put up the sail as suggested by Orson soon pulled Pierce together again.

"Say," he finally said when the boat was under way again. "Ain't I the dandy youth when it comes to dispersing a herd of attacking walrus?"

"Oh, yes, you're 'it' in this case," replied Orson. "Oh, you Blue Wing, get forward and watch that sail."

Blue Wing obeyed.

"That was a spendthrift action of yours, however," continued Orson to Pierce. "Don't you know that you ought not to bravely go and attack that walrus?"

Pierce looked bewildered.

His face fell.

"You don't think I did that on purpose?" he queried.

"Didn't you?"

"Say, do I look like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like a man who would deliberately cast himself out of a whaleboat ten miles from shore, into the jaws of a confounded big walrus, one big enough to eat up whaleboat, three men, and still have room in his stomach for all of the buildings at Grave Yard Point?"

"Now that you put it up to me in that form you don't look like a man crazy enough for that act, but you *did* the high dive, all right. If you didn't mean to do it why did you do it?"

"Because—"

Pierce gave Orson a long steady look.

"I did it, Orson," he said slowly, "because I thought the long winter at Grave Yard Point, the lack of amusement there would be compensated by your amusement when you saw me tumble over that way."

Orson took a long look at Pierce.

"I assure you," replied Orson, "that I am more than pleased with your efforts in my behalf. I also wish to assure you that your work was indeed a wonderful exhibition. I never saw before a look of absolute surprise come over the face of a walrus. They are not built in their faces for absolute surprise expressions but there's one thing without a doubt and that is when you charged at that whopper of a walrus you surprised him no end. He just looked at you once and then sank. Pierce, I'll bet if we knew it he is sinking yet."

Pierce laughed.

"Wasn't I funny? Well, any way it started the stampede. Those walrus are just that way. Let one old chap quit quick that way and it seems as if a hysteric fit struck a whole herd to disappear along with him. But in all my life up here I've never seen so many walrus together. I've seen big herds but if that herd wasn't three miles wide solid with walrus I'll eat every walrus in the herd."

"Guess you are right. We had a narrow escape all right. I thought sure we were going to be tipped over. What a fight, wasn't it?"

"It was a fight all right. And we were dead lucky to have such a happy ending."

The two men were thankful at their narrow escape.

But being men they did not show how thankful they really were to each other.

"Well," asked Orson, "what's next on your programme?"

"I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"I'm going to run the boat we are in to the shore when we are some eight or ten miles past Yellow Bluff."

"Why?"

"Then I'm going to cache the boat and take the dogs and the sled and start inland."

"Why don't you go right up Wager Inlet by water?"

"Takes too long."

"Oh."

"You see the inlet runs back from Hudson Bay, making a sort of river-like effect."

"Yes."

"If we go way around by the bay to the mouth of the inlet we must put in about a hundred miles of sailing."

"I begin to see what you propose."

"Now if I go directly from here by land, I can tap the inlet in about forty miles of dog work, and we save time and all that sort of thing."

"I understand. But why save time? Is there any great hurry?"

Pierce hesitated but finally spoke.

His words sent a chill down Orson's back-bone.

"When I was climbing into the whaleboat," he said "I had a strange feeling that I can not explain that we were being pursued by some force, just what I do not know. I felt that—"

Pierce stopped.

From out of the waste of wide waters that tossed about them, for they could not see land in the haze that hid it on the horizon, there drifted a wild cry.

"Help! Help!" shrieked a woman's voice.

"Listen!" cried Orson. "Hear that voice! It is that of a woman."

Pierce Gifford with a wide sweep of the tiller whirled the whaleboat in the direction of the drifting appeal for aid.

The sail filled with the breeze; the boat darted away in the direction of the cries.

"Help! Help for God's sake help!" wailed the far away voice in agony.

CHAPTER V.

THE ESKIMO'S MESSAGE.

"You're sure you got this straight, are ye?"

Captain Jim Wahpeton, active field leader of *The Brotherhood of Thieves* was questioning Tzintzontzan, the Eskimo, who had just arrived from Grave Yard Point, where he had delivered the Captain's message to Hink Bradford.

"Um," replied the Eskimo, who had learned a little of the white man's language and a lot of his evil ways during the time of his intercourse with him.

Cap. Jim, as he was always called, occupied a rough shack-like cabin, set flush up against a huge, high rock. The cabin comprised only one room.

It had a sheet-iron camp stove, a couple of bunks, a table, two or three chairs all hand-made out of bits of timber, and it was grimy, dirty, and smelled like a distillery, for there was always plenty of whiskey in the place, even if the food supply was short.

There was some wood piled up back of the shack. But it was mostly drift wood for wood was scarce as the place was far North of the tree line, and about all that could be got there was fished out of Hudson Bay.

Although the ground was getting soft under the rays of the July sun, it was noticeable that in sheltered places drift snow was plenty; in fact by keeping 'long shore in sheltered places one could make good going of snow sleighs.

There was still some ice about sheltered places, for in a region where lakes and rivers freeze clean to the bottom winters, there isn't much chance for ice to break up finally until late in July, and by August's latter part snow-storms are not unusual; it may be said that summer just takes a peek at the region, makes it summer in open spots, but in sheltered ones allows old winter to remain undisturbed.

In a sort of low hut and around it some twenty dogs snarled and fought.

The dogs were large and powerful with long rather curling hair, tails well curved over the back and very bushy, short and pointed ears and somewhat wolf-like aspect.

Their color varied. But generally speaking they were black and white, brown and white and a dingy white, but they are patient beasts, sagacious, and docile.

The flat-sleigh which they were hitched to by their simple harnesses lay near, and it was wonderful the great weights that could be carried along by them, when strung in teams of eight.

In fact, Cap. Jim used them almost entirely for the hauling work he had in mind, and with the snow-shoes which stood near, he did not care whether it was summer or winter, he was equipped for either season.

Cap. Jim was making wolf bait, for wolf skins mean money, and while awaiting his chance for robbery it might be well to pose as a reputable trapper—suspicion could not fall upon him thus quite so quickly.

The Eskimo watched his chief mix up strychnine with a little sugar and soda, and add a little red coloring matter to take off the glaring white look from the deadly capsule and its contents.

Around the cabin stood many bottles used in the hunter's quests.

A bottle containing oil from two castor beaver's scent-bags mixed with a little fish-oil stood near by.

A shaving covered with the oil and buried under the bark of a tree is enough to draw by its scent many a fine mink or marten to the trappers' traps.

There is nothing so absolutely cruel as the steel-trap, for it does not kill at once and it means long agony for the trapped animal, for no trapper can visit the widely scattered traps he has to set to make good kills, every day.

It means that the animals will have to linger in torment until the trapper arrives to kill them; but often animals if caught by the leg will gnaw off the member and all the trapper has for his pains is the leg with the valuable part of the animal missing.

"Did you hear me," cried Cap. Jim, as he put away the deadly drug he was mixing. "Hey, did you hear?"

"Yep," replied Tzintzontzan. "I hear."

"Are you sure you got the message straight?"

"Yep."

"I'm to watch these fellers, Pierce Gifford and Or-

son Hubbard, kill them if they are after us but leave them alone if they are not?"

"Yep."

"If it's a case of kill I'm to kill sudden and quick-like?"

"Yep."

"If it ain't I'm to help the two men as much as I can?"

"Yep."

"All right. Did Hink say anything else?"

"Nope."

"Didn't send me no money—although what would I do if I had it? Nawthin' ter buy up here."

Cap. Jim had been at his present shack only a few months.

He had been ostensibly trapping during most of the winter further toward Grave Yard Point.

His plan had been to locate near some reputable trapper, and then visit the other fellow's traps in advance.

By this easy method he collected many peltries.

Then the trapper's camp was often looted of all he had caught that had escaped Cap. Jim.

Often too a shot out of the bushes or from behind a tree, with a quiet burial thereafter had made much money for Cap. Jim; a general confiscation of the dead man's supplies, pelts, traps, and personal apparel had been conducive of much wealth.

All went to Hink Bradford quietly for he converted the ill gotten stuff into cash, took a liberal commission and settled with Cap. Jim for the remainder.

It would not seem as if this was a lucrative business? Yet it was.

When fifty or more half breeds, Indians, Eskimos, white thugs, and outlaws all sent to Cap. Jim their common loot, and he in turn sent it over to Hink Bradford there were considerable returns for every one.

While all in *The Brotherhood of Thieves* knew Cap. Jim, few knew Hink Bradford.

The ramifications of the *Brotherhood* was wide.

The gold-mines about Old Crow River had members of the band at work filching gold.

In the petroleum springs about Fort Churchill others reigned.

In the fur-trappers' camp; in the musk-ox hunters' district, wherever any activity reigned there was some bandit member of the *Brotherhood* to be found busily engaged in reaping for the common weal things of the under-world of crime.

Every outlaw shared equally in the plunder. If the man in the musk-ox district could steal nothing, then the man in the gold regions could, and the two men each shared in the work if not in the separate dangers.

The funny part of it all was that in this fine community of interests, the outlaws could not see that they could make a great deal more money by honest methods on this plan, than by dishonest ones.

Fifty men in a Trappers' League, each contributing to the common stock and all sharing equally, would have made money most any where in the region, and not have had a wide red trail of murder and theft in their wake. But then it seems useless to appeal to honest men's ways as object lessons for the crooked man; the thief appears rather to glory in crime, even when he knows that crime does not pay.

"Well," growled Cap. Jim, himself in his lonely shack, far away from even the slight civilization that

the region afforded, an object lesson to show that a dishonest life does not pay. "It don't seem to me I'm a git-ting' much out here. It's devilish dull. There's been a few musk-ox killed but not many. Seal oil and seal meat don't seem to be as plenty as it was, and there hasn't been a hold-up for any of us since we took ten of the boys and held up that French whaler and got that whale-bone off it."

"Yep. Whale-bone worth b-e-g mon' an' we git little byebye mon' from Hink," said the Eskimo.

"That's right. If there was \$20,000 worth of whale-bone we shipped by the underground down to Hink, I'll eat it. That all he claimed he got from us—why, Tzintzontzan, there was \$50,000 worth in that lot. We were most a year sending it down in small lots—say there's some of it cached here that we ain't never sent to Hink. I think the old skate is holdin' out on us."

"Dunno."

"Things ain't been any good for us since we held up Three Fingered Jack it seems to me?"

"Right."

"Yes, that's right. I'm sorry we held him up, but I had to have his dogs and sleds. My dogs were most all dead, my sleigh was out of repair, I lost my boat, and hadn't much grub left—a man can't eat musk-ox all his life, and I hate musk-ox meat any how. There's nothing else to kill up here it seems to me. There's fish below us there, but I hate fish—well, I'm going to pull stakes now that good weather has set in, and git back to Grave Yard Point."

"Can't go."

"Why not?"

"Orders."

"That's so—orders."

Cap. Jim remembered the explicit orders now from Hink Bradford.

He knew Hink.

He decided to obey orders.

"I suppose I must obey orders," the outlaw remarked with a sigh, thinking of the joys of the dance hall, the gambling room, and the bar in the saloon run by Sioux City Jim at Grave Yard Point. "Did you see anything of those two chaps we are to watch coming up?"

"Yep."

"Where?"

"Off Yaller Bluff."

"Oh. What were they doing?"

"Fight' walrus."

"Fighting walruses? That's a pretty hearty game when they are in big herds as they sometimes get to be about here."

"They herd all right."

The Eskimo winked.

"Where were the two men fighting the walruses?"

"'Bout ten mile, near Yaller Bluff."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared the outlaw. "Quite the cheese that news! They were in a whaleboat, were they? Fighting a vast herd of walruses. That settles it! They won't get out from that trouble. We won't have to kill 'em—"

The Eskimo stopped the outlaw's happy laughter.

The words the Eskimo spoke congealed the rest of the laugh on the bandit's thick lips.

"Men all 'scape," said Tzintzontzan.

Cap. Jim was grave now.

"They have all escaped?" he queried. "Are you sure?"

Tzintzontzan nodded.

Cap. Jim's beady-black eyes snapped with cruelty.

"We will have to watch those fellows—which way were they coming?"

"Through the woods, guess—see um steer, shore."

"You saw the two men heading for shore in their boat?"

"Yep."

"Then they are coming over-land. Did they have dogs?"

"Yep."

The anger in Cap. Jim's eyes was acute.

"I don't want them to see any of these dogs of mine. They came from the plunder we got in Three Fingered Jack's camp. No, I'd better meet them somewhere on the trip over—. They ought to know better than to try and kill musk-ox now. It's out of season for them. Well, any way, we will see if it's musk-ox or outlaws that they are after."

"Dunno."

"Do you know the two men, Gifford and Hubbard?"

"Nope. See um oncet at Grave Yard, might know um, might not. Know two men I see in whaleboat."

"Oh? You probably would know the men you saw in the whaleboat fighting the walruses?"

"Yep."

"That is you would know them if you saw them again?"

"Yep."

"But you don't know as they are Gifford and Hubbard?"

"I know—no—I don't know."

"You mean you know the men in the boat, would know them if you saw them again, but you can't identify them as the men we are after, is that what you mean?"

"Yep."

"Well, the only thing we can do is to do the best we can. My plan is for us to pretend to break camp here, in a way, send the dogs over to Big Frank who is located about five miles from here watching that band of surveyors who are surveying the route for the Hudson Bay Railroad, that's coming up soon to Fort Churchill and then up here—well my plan is then to git back to meet them fellers."

"They no know you?"

"Never saw me. I'll mix in with them as a trapper bound along with them for Wager's Inlet. I'll soon know what they are going to do and what they are after."

"Yep."

"You keep hid but watch us carefully. Always be where I kin git to you quick. Between us we will sound those fellows out. If they are all right, we will not kick but let 'em git away. If not—bang!"

Cap. Jim made a tottering motion as if a man falling after a shot wound and dying in agony.

"Good," cried the Eskimo. "When we start?"

"Jest as soon as we can cache things—you git off with them dogs and git back here quick as you can. I'll have camp pretty well broke by then."

Secret methods of spying were added to the danger from the assassin before his weapons were used to blot from life Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard.

The outlaw's net was spread. Would the two honest young men walk into it?

CHAPTER VI.

A CRY IN THE WILDERNESS.

"Help! Help!"

The voice that had so startled the two friends and business associates, Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard, drifted toward them again, as their boat felt the impact of the breeze and under direction of Pierce hurried to the sound of the wailing cry.

"What do you suppose that voice is?" asked Orson as the whaleboat cut the waves in the direction of the sound and threw spray over the two men.

"I don't know," replied Pierce. "I just know that it is a voice. It is a woman's voice. That's all I can say about it."

"How could a woman be up here?"

"I don't know. Blue Wing, did you hear that cry?"

The Chipewyan Indian nodded indifferently. Then he looked up to the sail near by which he was standing. His business was to mind the sail and not to listen to vagrant cries of women.

"What do you think that cry was?"

"Made by woman," growled Blue Wing.

"Could a woman be up here?"

"Eskimo," snapped Blue Wing.

"But Eskimo women, eh?"

"Yep."

"Yes, what, Blue Wing," urged Pierce.

"Eskimo always leave old woman, or young girl, when young girl sick. No use has Eskimo for man old, and no good work, or young girl, sick and no good work."

Pierce turned with a mystified air to Orson.

"Blue Wing means," replied Orson in answer to Pierce's look, "that the Eskimo custom is to desert their old and helpless and the young and ill, to die, anywhere in the wilderness. He thinks that the cry comes from some woman thus deserted."

"No," rejoined Pierce, "that cry comes from no Eskimo woman, old or young."

"What makes you suspect that?" asked Orson.

"That voice speaks English. The tone is that of an educated woman, and from the roundness of the voice, its timbers as we might say, I think the woman who is calling for aid is a young one."

"A young woman, well educated, English, out here in the Barren Lands, calling for aid? Nonsense!"

"Wait and see. It won't take long to find out—we are nearly in."

The remark caused Orson to half stand up in the boat.

"I see a woman running up and down the shelving rocky beach, dead ahead of us, Pierce!" he cried. "Starboard your helm a trifle. That's right. Steady! Hold the boat there if you can. We will be in the surf in a minute. There's quite a surf that dashes up on that rocky point where the girl is standing."

Pierce kept the boat in the markings indicated by Orson.

"I see her now," cried Orson. "Better, much better. Say, Pierce, she is waving her hands to us. Good Lord, man, it's an English woman! Say, she is young as you thought. Steady! We'll be in the surf in a moment."

The boat bobbed a bit at the seas which made a cross war of it, for lashed by a smart breeze they came tumb-

ling in in high rollers, only to be met by another wind-lashed billow from the cross seas.

The whaleboat grounded with a little grunt-like crash.

Blue Wing was out of the boat in a trice and had hauled it up on the bank.

It was quickly out of danger from the roistering surf.

Pierce jumped ashore.

A woman came running to him with tears streaming down her face, and as Pierce stepped forward to assist her tottering steps, the girl fell in a dead faint at his feet.

He stooped to pick her up.

Pierce gave a loud cry.

The cry summoned Orson who had been helping Blue Wing beach the boat.

When he saw the girl lying in Pierce's arms, he also gave a stifled but loud cry.

"Who is she?" Orson said peering into the girl's pallid face.

"She is Adrian Bradford," replied Pierce.

"Good Lord!"

This was the only fitting thing that Orson could possibly think of.

"How in the name of all that's good did that remarkably pretty girl come here?" cried Orson.

"No time for speculations. Help me to carry her to the boat. Don't you see that she is in a deep stupor. She's half starved, and wholly benumbed from cold, and exposure. You have Blue Wing pitch the tent quick, get a fire built back there under the shade of that rock, where the wind won't hit us so sharply and get something or other for this girl."

Orson was a capable man.

In a surprisingly short time Adrian Bradford was sitting by a rousing fire, shielded by heavy blankets from the air, which in spite of the time of year was still bleak and cold, while Pierce fed her from hot toddy and soup-pot in alternate doses.

The girl seemed to hardly understand where she was being nursed back to life or by whom.

She submissively took the food and stimulant offered her and soon was fast asleep, under numerous coverings.

"Hey, you, Blue Wing," cried Pierce to the Chipewyan. "You stand in call and if that girl awakes summon us."

The Indian nodded.

"Come on, Orson," added Pierce, "come over here by the whaleboat I want to talk to you."

The two men sat down on the rocks by the boat.

"Well, what do you think of this?" said Pierce.

"You mean Adrian Bradford?" replied Orson.

"Yes."

"I don't know. I would have as soon expected to see that girl here as a date-palm growing over here in the Barren Lands."

"So would I—but here she is."

"I can hardly believe my ears. Here's the richest girl in Grave Yard Point marooned on these inhospitable shores where a rat couldn't find much to eat. It's incomprehensible."

"Isn't it? I just can not understand it myself. Why is she here?"

"I don't know."

"Do you suppose Hink Bradford, her father, knows

anything about her being here?"

"Got me again."

"Why she must have been brought here in a boat?"

"Again I can't help you in the slightest way."

"I tell you there's a mystery here!"

"You bet!"

"But I hope it isn't one that we can't get to the bottom of."

"So do I."

"I'd give a good deal to get a true explanation of it all."

"We will get it."

"When?"

"When the girl wakes up."

"I don't know. She may not have been strong enough to tell us all she knows after her troubles in a long time. She may be able to tell us now——"

The speaker's words were cut short by a hail from the Indian.

Pierce and Orson hurried to see the girl, whom it was evident by the hail of the Chipewyan, had awoke.

They found Adrian awake and stronger and sensible.

"Ah," she cried when she saw the two men. "It was you that saved me?"

"Yes," said Pierce and Orson in a breath.

"You are Pierce Gifford, and you are Orson Hubbard?"

A little bow toward each indicated that the girl knew each of the young men by sight.

"How do you know us?" asked Pierce.

"I have often seen you at Grave Yard Point."

"Oh!"

"It's not such a metropolis that it is surprising that I should know you by sight?" queried Adrian.

Pierce laughed.

"For us we are willing to admit that we knew you, Miss Bradford."

A slight wave of color crept into the girl's pale, but sweetly rounded cheeks.

"Don't you think that after you have saved my life, you might dispense with the formal Miss?"

Pierce colored a trifle under his tan.

But Orson jumped into the breach.

"All right, Adrian," he shouted. "We are all good people here together! This isn't a society function. We will keep ourselves informed of all the society airs necessary, and then we will do as we choose. We know the social rattle—but we will practise it a la Barren Lands."

Adrian and Pierce smiled.

"Well, then Adrian," said Pierce. "Can you tell me how you came here?"

"I don't know," replied the girl.

"You don't know?"

"That is what I said. I don't know."

Pierce and Orson exchanged glances of surprise and wonder.

"Would you mind explaining?" weakly asked Orson.

"I wish I could," the girl replied, "but I can not."

"Don't you know how you got here?" questioned Pierce.

"Really, no. I don't remember anything but a sensation of cold. I seemed to have been asleep. I woke up here," cried the girl.

"Do you know when that was?"

"Ages ago, it seems to me," replied the pale girl.

"I awoke. Then I arose. I was stretched out near a rock. I saw a boat near me. I went down to it. It was a canoe. I know it was my canoe, and that is all. You know I often go out in the still waters of Hudson Bay in my canoe. But why it was here, who brought it here, all is a blank."

Pierce was all eyes.

Orson was so interested that he sat looking at the girl as if she was some new kind of freak.

"It's got me going," Orson sighed. "You could not have rowed yourself or paddled yourself here from Grave Yard Point. Let's see. Grave Yard Point is where Wager's Inlet starts out from Hudson Bay. It's easily a hundred miles from here. Now where you are is about thirty-five or forty miles from Grave Yard Point—oh, you couldn't have paddled up here. No, that's impossible!"

"She couldn't have come overland," remarked Pierce. "It's easily a hundred and fifty miles here from the Point overland. You see about here if one comes from the Point by Hudson Bay, one can land, then take dogs and sled to cross country points, where you can tap the Inlet in the musk-ox country—that is what we designed to do. But to sail all the way is the longest for Grave Yard Point and the musk-ox country lie to each other about like the letter 'L'. It's quicker to cut corner by land than sail all the way up the foot of the 'L' and then all the way up the straight line to it."

The girl nodded.

"I know," she said. "I feel sure that I was brought here by some one. By whom I do not know."

Pierce thought a moment.

"Whoever brought you here," he remarked, "brought you to die, they hoped. No one could be marooned upon this desolate shore without dying sooner or later. Did you have any provisions?"

"None," mourned Adrian.

"Whew," whistled Orson. "How long have you been here?"

"I don't know."

"What?" asked Pierce.

"Really I don't know. I'm sensible of one thing and that is that it was yesterday that I awoke. For I was all night that has just passed walking up and down. It seemed in the bleak winds that rushed here that I would freeze to death."

"Whew!" cried Orson.

"Ain't this the limit?" said Pierce.

"Then when morning broke I seemed to go to pieces. I don't remember anything," added Adrian, "except that I was walking up and down and crying for aid. Why I cried for help I don't know. I suppose it was instinct to try and live," replied Adrian.

"It was lucky for you that you did cry for aid. If you had not we would not have known where you were or even that you were here at all," replied Pierce.

Orson who had been watching Blue Wing saw that the Indian was not caring properly for the dogs that had been unshipped from the whaleboat and so he remarked to Pierce that he "would go and see if he and Blue Wing could get enough seal meat to feed the dogs a good supper with, instead of the pemmican they had brought along for the dogs."

Pierce nodded.

As soon as Orson was gone Pierce asked Adrian if

she could possibly think of any one who wished her to die.

"Not a soul," she said. "I have been thinking of that phase of things ever since I have been sensible," Adrian added. "My relations with every one are perfect so far as I know. I don't think I have an enemy in the world."

"We often think that, and yet we have many," rejoined Pierce. "Were your relations with your father, perfect?"

"Yes. Almost ideal. He was always the kindest of men. He and I were talking of leaving the territory for good, only a few nights ago. He said that we had all the money we needed and he didn't see why we should slave any longer."

"Did you suggest the going away?"

"No. Father did. He said he had worked hard for his money and we might as well go over into the United States and have some fun with it all. He said we couldn't use any cash up here to amount to anything and there wasn't much amusement to keep one in Grave Yard Point."

Pierce could not help laughing.

"If there is anything more deadly dull than this hamlet we live in, I don't know of it," the man cried. "It's the hypothesis of dullness, I'm sure, now isn't it?"

Adrian admitted that it was.

"Now do you know anything about your father's business matters?" asked Pierce with his eyes fixed upon the pretty ones of Adrian, which he thought were of a heavenly blue.

"N-o," replied the girl. "I don't know much except that he says that he is interested in many matters. I guess he does some money lending, doesn't he?"

Pierce nodded.

"No, father never talks much about his business associates," added the girl.

"He'd better not if he wants his daughter to respect him," thought Pierce.

But he was careful not to allow his feelings to appear on his face or in any way indicate themselves in his voice.

"Then there's no possibility that your father wished to get rid of you is there?" Pierce said.

Adrian's laughter, soft and silvery, pealed out.

"Not the slightest in the world," she said, "in fact if my father has missed me, for sometimes he is away on business for days at a time and I am left alone with my old Indian woman who aids me in the house-work of our home, he is probably tearing his hair and offering half if not all of his fortune for my quick and safe return."

Pierce nodded.

"I think that if I was abducted and left here marooned to die, that it was some one who had a powerful wish to injure my father. My abduction seems to me to indicate a wish to get even with father. I feel sure it's not a personal enmity against me."

"Well, it came mighty near coming to the same thing," replied Pierce. "It does not make much difference to you, whether it was personal enmity that caused your abduction or enmity against your father, for in each case you would have been the victim."

"If it had not been for you—and Orson Hubbard."

Pierce blushed slightly.

"We only did our duty," he cried. "Don't thank us."

"It was lucky for me that your duty brought you here. If it had not I would have been a dead girl by this time. I don't feel that I could have lasted another hour," said Adrian. "It was a lucky thing for me that you and Orson were hurrying down the bay."

"It was a happy thing for us that we were," remarked Pierce, "it doesn't fall to two young men every day to rescue the prettiest and richest girl in Grave Yard Point."

This was a rather pointed speech but Adrian laughed and passed it off with the remark that "neither riches or beauty were of any use where I was marooned."

"Do you know," replied Pierce, "that it seems to me that there is something behind this that while we don't understand just now, we can by the exercise of a little diplomacy."

"How?"

"Who ever attempted to kill you is coming back here to find if you are really dead."

"I should think that possible."

"My advice to you is that you take a suit of a Chipe-wyan boy's that we have in our kit. It was going to be given to a little friend of mine in the United States and I had the wife of Blue Wing make it with infinite care. If I were you I'd take that suit, disappear in the tent, put it on, give me your clothing and I will display them liberally around the beach here, then you jump into the whaleboat, and we will play that you're a nephew of Blue Wing's."

The girl laughed.

"What am I to do with this blonde hair of mine?" she asked.

"Tuck it up under your Indian boy's cap."

"But my fair skin?"

"Wash it in horse-chestnut or walnut water. It will turn brown and——"

"But will it stay brown? I don't want to be a brunette, I like being a blonde."

"Oh, the stain will wear off. It's better to take some risk and find who tried to kill you than not, it would seem to me—next trip may be more successful."

Adrian thought over the matter at length. The more she thought, the better she liked the plan. It appealed to her sense of the dramatic, and it also was practical, she could see.

Who ever left her in the Barren Lands was hovering about somewhere. He or she would certainly return.

"Give me the boy's suit," cried Adrian with a charming smile, "we will try to be in some position to sift this mystery. I don't want to feel that I am liable to assassination every minute—I wonder what kind of a boy I'll make."

"Ho!" cried Blue Wing. "Man coming in boat."

Pierce ran down to the boat with a part of the clothing that Adrian had flung at him in his hand.

Wit of the white honest man and wit of the outlaw were about to be tested.

CHAPTER VII.

TRICKERY.

In three more minutes Captain Jim Wahpeton jumped from a dingy in which he had rowed across a narrow bit of the bay, and slouched up to Pierce Gifford.

The snakey, shifting eye of Cap Jim warned Pierce to be on his guard.

One look caused Pierce to decide what course to take.

"Hello, stranger," Pierce roared in his hearty clear voice. "Glad you came. There's something strange been going on here."

Captain Jim Wahpeton looked surprised.

"What is it?" he asked in his deep, growling voice.

"There's been a girl murdered here or something," cried Pierce.

A sneering look came into Jim's face.

He stepped back and laid his hand on his revolver which hung in his belt as if the remark must need cause him to defend himself.

Pierce pretended not to see the motion and continued in the same hearty way.

"It's like this, stranger," Pierce said. "We made this shore about three hours ago to camp for the night. We found a bunch of women's clothes but no woman."

"Oh," sulkily answered Jim. "No sign of a gal?"

"Not the slightest. Things seem black to me. First place what became of the girl if there was once a girl here in these clothes. If not where is the girl that left these—" here Pierce held out a dress and a couple of skirts which he had taken the precaution to rub pretty thoroughly in the dirt before he showed them to the thug.

"Any marks on 'em?" queried Jim shrewdly.

"No," replied Pierce as he carefully examined a waist-band; but he didn't tell the truth for there was a neat monogram "A. T. B." to be plainly seen.

Jim's face cleared.

Pierce, who was watching him covertly, was thoroughly convinced that Jim could have told more about the girl and her mysterious disappearance than he chose just then, although there was nothing really tangible in any remark or movement that Jim made.

Jim's attitude was that of a man who knew something of the clothing yet who did not propose to tell, but it was all so fleeting that while Pierce searched his brains for some confirmation of his suspicions, to him the entire matter narrowed down to his frank mental confession that there was only a slight suspicion at best in his mind against Jim.

"Any way," thought Pierce, "if this chap thinks that I suspect him there will be 'nothing doing' for me. I must be careful and dissemble."

Jim on his part was equally wary.

He had so schooled his face that not a thought betrayed him.

"If this is the man I want, I must look out," thought Jim. "We can't be too careful just now."

Pierce decided to change the conversation.

"Well, girl or no girl," he cried, "she's dead! I've searched this barren coast for five miles either way and no trace of anything can be found."

"Then she's dead, I should say," muttered Jim. "If she was out here long in this kind of weather she'd have to be a polar bear to live."

"That's what," replied Pierce. "Now, stranger, you don't know me so I'll tell you my name—it's Pierce Gifford. I'm a Hudson's Bay Company grader from Grave Yard Point. This is my side partner, Orson Hubbard, over there's my Indian cook and deck-hand Blue Wing, and the rest of the crew is his nephew, a boy, whose name is—hey you in there, what's your confounded name?"

It was a bold stroke.

Inwardly Pierce trembled.

Suppose that Adrian Bradford was not ready for an answer. On the other hand suppose that she was allowed to at first show herself, unaccustomed to her new character and betrayed herself by a stutter that showed she was no Indian, and by an awkwardness in her boy's garb that would betray the fact that she was no boy.

Better, had argued Pierce, to call to her when she was under cover, and get the first step over; it's the first step in everything that is the hardest to take.

But Pierce had "framed up for himself the greatest surprise in his life" as he later told Orson Hubbard.

No sooner had he asked the question than a stupid, ungainly Eskimo lad, whose face and hands were a rich dark brown, whose blue eyes were round and stupid looking, stuck his head out of the tent and gave a sheepish, clownish grin.

"Um" said the boy in the guttural, fishy voice of the Eskimo.

Seal oil diet seemed to exude from the lad.

"Um," he said again.

"What an actress that girl would make," thought Pierce.

But he repeated his question again in a louder tone.

"What's your name?"

The reply sounded exactly as if a cross-cut saw had been run through a hard log.

"Ivakuni Iztaccihuatl," said Adrian with a foolish grin.

"What?" cried Pierce.

"Haw! Haw!" roared Jim. "Why didn't ye haul that name in behind ye on that dawg sleigh, using them dawgs over there—say, them's likely dawgs!"

Adrian dashed into the tent, her fur and deer skin suit with wide trousers, being far more modest than the "hobble-skirt" of civilization and her seal boots and close fitting yet roomy fur blouse being far less noticeable than the tailor-make gown of the outer, and what it would call itself, the more polite world.

Pierce breathed freer.

The crisis was passed.

Adrian's fine bit of comedy acting had thrown the fellow Jim off his guard; he took Ivakuni Iztaccihuatl, at his own Eskimo valuation; he was left out of the picture now; Jim was anxious to talk "dawg."

Pierce was perfectly willing to humor him.

"Where'd ye git them dawgs?" questioned Jim.

"They belong to the Hudson's Bay Company."

"Oh. Will ye sell 'em?"

"I can't. You might buy them by seeing the Postmaster at Fort Churchill. I am only a grader and buyer of furs, you know—you're a trapper aren't you? Got any catch?"

Jim's face darkened again. He saw he had better make a "bluff."

"Yep," he said, "I'm a trapper and I've got some furs over to my shack that I mount sell ye—are ye on a buying trip?"

"No, I'm out on a hunting trip for fun. I'm going to try my luck up in the Barren Lands."

"Don't think you'll have much luck."

"Why not?"

"I went over the ground two weeks ago and only got one ox."

"How was that?"

"There's a schooner wintered in a snug little harbor

up the Inlet a bit. The man on it is a white man, and he has sent all the natives down to Repulse Bay with instructions to hunt the ox clean back to the Inlet."

"Well?"

"They cleaned up about all there was to clean."

"I see. That's hard luck! But we might get a stray ox or two after all. I'd hate to come so far and get no sport."

"I tell you, you won't do much. The natives tell me that there's so many wolves about that they either kill all the ox or they drive them away."

"We might go hunting for wolves?"

"Don't git shet o' any wolves. I seen a pack with at least a thousand big wolves in it up near the islands about the Norrows, when I was fishing for seal meat a spell ago. Wolves when they git in packs like that will attack anything. Game isn't known up here to any extent. We'd all be fine pickings for a pack of them critters. The Arctic wolf ain't no easy thing to face."

Pierce nodded.

He wondered if this man was telling the truth; he wondered who the man really was, but decided to ask no explanations unless they came from a volunteer statement on the part of the stranger.

Jim on his side wanted time to think just what course to pursue.

He slouched away toward the camp fire on which a big pot of stew was simmering.

This gave a chance for Orson Hubbard to come nearer.

He had been watching the play of emotions with wondering eyes.

"How did you like your partner?" he asked.

Pierce sniffed.

"Sneaky looking cuss, isn't he?"

"Yep."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Not I."

"Well I do."

"Who is he then, if you know him so well?"

"Cap. Jim Wahpeton."

It required all of Pierce's resolution to repress a violent start.

"You don't mean Cap. Jim, the outlaw?"

"I do."

"The man we suspect with being the partner of Hink Bradford, father of Adrian Bradford, in the murder of Three Fingered Jack?"

"He's the man."

"By thunder!"

"No use of thundering at that chap—unless you do it with your gun."

Pierce was surprised at the temerity of the thug in coming to his outfit.

"What do you think the fellow wants here?" he questioned of Orson.

"I should say it was an easy one. He is here trying to spy on us."

"To spy on us? Why?"

"Oh, ask me an easy one first. It won't do any good to ask questions I can't answer. I don't know why that outlaw is here but I'll make a bet on why, if you're a game sport enough to take it up."

"When you talk about a bet, name it. What's your proposition?"

"I'll bet you the price of twenty mink skins that

that chap knows more about the marooning of Adrian Bradford than he is willing to admit."

"That's against betting rules."

"What is?"

"Your proposition."

"How do you make that out?"

"It's against betting rules to bet on a dead sure thing. It's a dead sure thing that chap knows a lot about the marooning of Adrian. It's also a dead sure thing that he is here to spy on us. Don't give him a chance to get wise to anything that will make him think we suspect him or make him think that we are out for anything but a hunting trip—say did you see Adrian hand him one?"

"You bet I did! Wasn't it great? That girl's all in it, you bet! She's a brave kid and I'm not going to let her get the worst of this deal."

"Nor am I."

The two men then started for the camp fire.

But nothing could be seen of their involuntary guest.

"Where's the outlaw?" whispered Orson.

Pierce looked about in surprise.

Adrian in her garb of Ivakuni Iztaccihautl, the Eskimo lad, poked her head out of the tent.

"I saw that fellow making tracks for the bay where his boat was moored," the girl whispered.

Pierce ran out of the little gully where the tent had been pitched to get away from the wind's sweep.

As soon as he struck high ground he saw a boat rushing away from the shore. A glance told him that the boat contained Jim Wahpeton, the outlaw.

"Gone!" shouted Pierce. "The outlaw has gone as mysteriously as he came."

Orson, Adrian, and Blue Wing rushed to the side of Pierce when they heard his hail.

They watched the mysterious dingy and its mysterious oarsman plow away toward a hilly bluff to the right, where there was a narrow arm of the bay.

"Look!" said Orson. "He has pulled his boat up the bluff, and is dragging it over the other side. Where is he going?"

"Going to cross another arm of the bay. Here Hudson Bay is dotted with make-believe islands, jutting bluffs, and narrow split up arms of tiny creeks, and rivers, and into this labyrinth of land and water our friend the outlaw has plunged. There is no use of trying to follow him!"

"Why not?"

"Because firstly, he has a good start."

"And secondly?"

"Like a bad penny that fellow is bound to come back."

"Think so?" remarked Orson.

"I do."

Adrian who had been looking back toward the camp-fire had not joined in the conversation between Pierce and Orson, but now she spoke up.

"There's something strange happened at the camp fire. Blue Wing seems to have fallen in a fit."

Pierce and Orson started for the fire on the keen run.

A terrible sight met their eyes.

Blue Wing was lying on his back.

His body was as stiff as a board.

His jaws were tightly locked. His lower extremities were extended and stiff and the soles of his feet

were concave. The man's skin was livid. His eye-balls were protruded.

"Good God!" murmured Pierce, "the poor fellow is dying!"

As he spoke Pierce looked at Blue Wing's eyes.

They were unseeing with fearfully dilated pupils.

A spasm of the dying man's chest seemed to set in—his eyes rolled dreadfully and his jaw relaxed.

Blue Wing was dead.

Adrian was as white as a sheet.

Her breath came in quick gasps.

"What was the matter?" she whispered. "What caused Blue Wing's death?"

Pierce did not answer.

His eyes were trying to pick up the threads of the disaster from the mute witnesses about it.

He saw something glisten in Blue Wing's dead hand. When he looked at it he found it was a spoon.

Then Pierce saw that by the dead Chipewyan's side was a bowl.

The bowl had been overturned.

Remains of the savory stew that was still simmering on the camp fire had been in the bowl; this was shown by bits of the stew that were strewn about the bowl when Blue Wing had dropped it in the first paroxysm that had seized him.

"Hum," remarked Pierce.

His mind picked up and retained all of the mute evidence thus presented to him.

"Get me one of our dogs," commanded Pierce.

In a moment Orson had secured one.

"Bring him over near the simmering pot at the fire," added Pierce.

Orson obeyed.

The dog was hungry and he eagerly watched Pierce ladle out a very small quantity of the liquid in the pot.

The dog lapped the stew up with greedy tongue.

Pierce stood watching the dog.

Adrian crept up and watched the scene. Orson still held the dog by the collar.

In a few moments the animal showed signs of uneasiness.

"What's the matter with the dog?" whispered Adrian pointing to the animal who was trembling as if there was a general disorder of its nervous system.

"Wait," counselled Pierce.

The dog began to tremble violently.

When it tried to move its limbs seemed to be stiff.

By and by the animal seemed to find it impossible to stand.

It laid down, while a spasmodic contraction of all its muscles became plainly manifest.

"For God's sake," cried Orson, his face white and beads of perspiration standing on his forehead.

"Pierce, what's the matter with this dog?"

Pierce turned around quickly and pointed to the dead Chipewyan.

"The same thing that has happened to that poor Indian there," he hissed.

"What has happened to beast and man?" cried Adrian.

"Poisoned!" said Pierce in a deadly whisper.

"Poisoned?" cried Adrian and Orson together.

"Poisoned!" repeated Pierce with a muttered oath.

A silence like that of the grave, which had snatched the Indian for its prey, fell upon the party.

"My God, Pierce!" said Orson at length in a low tone, "explain what you mean? Who could have poisoned Blue Wing and this dog?"

"The poison, from the symptoms I have seen in the dying Indian, and in this dog, upon whom I experimented, shows me that strychnine had been used in this murder of an innocent man," said Pierce.

"Strychnine?"

"Yes, that deadly preparation from *nux vomica*, as is the pharmacopoeial name of the seed of *strychnos nux vomica* or *poison nut*, that deadly importation from the East Indies, which we use so freely up here in the killing of wolves, under the name of strychnine," answered Pierce.

All marveled at the words of Pierce.

"But how did Blue Wing get the poison?" queried Orson.

"Do you remember when that arch-thug, that Jim Wahpeton, left me and went toward the camp-fire and stood as if lost in thought by it?" asked Pierce.

"Yes!" cried Adrian and Orson.

"It was then he dropped a capsule which contained the fatal dose in the kettle of stew. He thought we would all partake of the stew soon and that we all would die in agony, and he at one fell swoop would have accomplished the horrible plot of The Brotherhood of Thieves, which means the murder of Adrian Bradford, and of ourselves!" thundered Pierce.

"Having, as he thought, poisoned, he made his escape?" questioned Orson.

"Yes," replied Pierce. "Now you tip that stew over. I'll bet we will find enough of those deadly crystals in the bottom of the pot of stew to kill a regiment of men."

In the dregs of the stew were shown the fatal crystals in doses enough to destroy many men, as Pierce had predicted.

The strychnine had been colored it was seen, to take away the usual deadly whiteness.

"Well, that outlaw's plot has failed," said Pierce as he stood looking at the remains of the crystals, which had not dissolved in the stew. "It has failed and Jim Wahpeton has thrown down the battle gauntlet. It's a fight to the grave for some one now, as well as for our Chipewyan friend, here, Blue Wing. Come Orson, we must bury Blue Wing decently. He died in our service and by his death did us the best of service, for it saved our lives."

Adrian was in tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIFIC DANGER.

No sooner was poor Blue Wing buried, than Pierce Gifford called a council of war.

"Adrian," said Pierce immediately, "you must attend and help us."

The girl laughed.

"How?" she asked. "As Adrian Bradford or as Ivakuni Iztaccihuatl?"

Pierce looked astonished.

"By Hokey," he said, "where did you rake up those names? They are more Eskimo than the Eskimo. They sound far to the Nor' Nor' West country."

Adrian made a little face.

"But they aren't Eskimo," she said.

"Aren't Eskimo? What are they then?"

"Fakes."

"No they are not fakes for no name with the sound of a cross-cut saw grinding through a log, can be 'faked.'"

"Well, if you want to know, you had me frightened nearly to death when you called."

"I did, eh?"

"You did."

"You see I had just gotten into these boys, ahem, unmentionables, and was debating which way they went on for an Eskimo boy unless you can see his face, looks to you as if he was going away from you when he is coming toward you, and when he is coming toward you as if he was going away, and then there came your harsh yell."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't mention it. But when you called, I had got that walnut juice wash on my face, neck and arms—dear me, will it ever wear off?—and so it was up to me to justify your good opinion of my capabilities in the way of playing the part of an Eskimo boy—so—"

"You caught up a couple of teeth when you spoke that name of Iv-an, what do you call it?"

"Ivakuni Iztaccihuatl," supplied Adrian.

"That's the chap."

"Well," added the girl, "I thought of my school days. I remembered that Ivakuni was the name of a town in Japan—so I used that name as the first name for my new character."

"By Hokey!"

"Then I remembered that Iztaccihuatl was the name of a mountain in Mexico—and I said that name. Didn't both together sound like an Eskimo?"

"Surely."

"Which shows that Japan and Mexico and Eskimo land aren't so far apart in sound of speech at that. Well, the bluff worked?"

"Splendidly. Cap. Jim Wahpeton was stumped. He never suspected for a minute that you were Adrian Bradford. Do you know Jim?"

"I've been puzzling that question out. It would seem to me that my father brought him to our house at Grave Yard Point once a long, long while ago, on some business or other, but I don't really know whether I am right or not."

As Adrian spoke she looked puzzled.

"I appreciate your position," said Pierce, "for as you have told me that your father kept much from you in the way of his business, you can only arrive at points which touch upon his business by comparisons."

"That's true. It's only by comparing tiny isolated facts with others and then getting a general average on the entire problem that I know just what to think. In this case, I think that I have seen Jim, the outlaw before, but I am not sure."

"It may pay you to search your memory to its depths, for I have the idea that Jim, the outlaw, knows something about your being deserted on that island—yet I am not so sure. I may be mistaken."

"It means that we will have to do the best we can, and watch and try in every way to get to the very dregs of this mystery. I know that there is a reason for my being brought here, and—well, let the matter go into the future for a solution. Now we can only see a few feet ahead; later things may drop into proper line, and we may know more."

"That's true philosophy," put in Orson, who had been getting everything in readiness for a sail in the

whaleboat. "If people would only live day by day. This planning ahead when you may be dead, isn't worth the heart-pangs we give it all."

"That's right," replied Pierce.

"I have thought often of the lilies of the field, that after all, seem to 'take no heed of the morrow'; they seem to have a better time than we do," merrily said Adrian.

"It all reminds me of an old chap who was one of the 'always dying' kind, don't you know," said Orson.

Adrian and Pierce laughed knowingly.

They knew the kind.

"Well," continued Orson, "this fellow late in life made quite a great deal of money. He got to be sixty, before he'd made his pile, and about sixty-five he decided that he was going to 'cash in' so he went to a cemetery in my native town, and he put up a thousand dollar monument."

"He wasn't dead?" asked Adrian.

"N-o. He had his epitaph put on the tomb-stone, and you bet he said nice things about himself. He also had a medallion of his face and torso carved on the stone, the date of his birth, and a place all ready for the date of his death, carved all save the exact day and month."

"Ho! Heel!" roared Pierce and Adrian.

"Well," added Orson, "he used to take his friends up Sundays to 'see his monument.'"

"What next?"

"That old chap lived from sixty-five to eighty-four years old, and thus for nineteen years he took his friends up every Sunday 'to see his monument.'"

"Then what happened?"

"He decided to go to Europe, and on the way over his steamer sank and he and about four hundred other people were drowned."

"Say, that was sad."

"You bet it was for *his body was never recovered*. For nineteen years that darned tomb-stone had been waiting for the corpse of the owner of the shaft to come along and give it something to prove it was a real tomb-stone and not a near-tomb-stone, and when the owner was ready with the corpse, he must needs go and get drowned and couldn't be buried at the foot of his own tomb-stone at that."

Adrian and Pierce laughed heartily over this story.

"That's right," continued Orson. "A chap I once knew very well was a broker and a bank cashier and all that sort of thing. Well, after he was dead his friends published a book he wrote. One of the town characters in the book, whom I knew well back in the States, was made to say this, 'If ye gets a ten dollar bill, put it in to you, or on to you as quick as you can fer they ain't no pocket in a shroud.' He was just dead right. You don't know when, how or where the game's going to break up for you, and so what's the use?"

"That's so," replied Pierce dryly.

"When we left Grave Yard Point, at the extreme tip of Wager Inlet and Hudson Bay, we were going to run our whaleboat to Yellow Bluff and then with our dogs cross the country to tap the Inlet higher up and cut off a long sea journey. Along comes a gent we don't want to see, have no use for, and dumps strychnine in our stew-pot, and kills our good Injun friend Blue Wing—"

"To say nothing of the chap (if it was a chap) that

dumped a forlorn girl out in the remorseless, inhospitable shores of this bay, and which has caused no end of trouble to two gallant men——"

"Let up," cried the two aforesaid gallant men. "Let up!"

"Anyway," added Pierce lamely, "our course is changed. We aren't going up the Inlet via the land, but we are going up it via the bay and the inlet itself."

"Why?" asked Orson.

"I'm going to try and avoid Jim, the outlaw, by this method. You know he has tried to poison us, and then rushed over there and landed, where we would have had to land, if we had taken the overland route—but if we take the water route we will probably fool him."

"I hope so," prayed Adrian.

"Is this the way to fool the outlaw?" asked Orson.

"I think so," replied Pierce. "How are the dogs?"

"Fine. All are aboard the whaleboat," replied Orson.

"How's the dog that I fed some of the poisoned stew to?" added Pierce.

Orson laughed.

"How is he? How is he?" Orson laughed. "He's the liveliest pup you ever saw. He was pretty sick for awhile but he soon recovered, as you did not give him a dose of strychnine enough to kill him, only to 'experiment' with on him and then he jumped on every dog in the place and licked 'em till they howled for help and mercy."

"What?" said Pierce.

"Fact," replied Orson. "They say strychnine is a grand tonic if you don't overdo. That dog got enough to tonic him up into a fighting humor. He reminded me of a man who married seven wives—it was all right after all to marry one girl, but in marrying the other six he rather overdid it."

With a jaunty nod at Adrian, Orson stalked away whistling.

After Pierce had shied a rock at him, that if it had hit him, would have ended his humorous career forever, the three travelers, now heartened up and feeling able to cope with most anything of a bandit kind, embarked in the whaleboat and soon were pretty well out from the shore.

The shore was making a faint smudge on the horizon when Pierce who was at the tiller steering, while Orson watched the sail, hailed his companion and motioned him to come aft.

Adrian had stowed herself in a comfortable and sunny spot underneath some furs and had gone soundly to sleep.

"What's the matter?" queried Orson.

"Look over the bay," replied Pierce.

The sky was overcast by clouds in what seemed to Orson to be within a stone's throw of the whaleboat.

But at the same time there was a rift in the clouds that seemed to let in vertical rays.

These beat down upon the tossing waters of Hudson Bay.

Then there came a spectacle of novel and appalling grandeur.

At a distance of only a few hundred feet, the bay's surface was bubbling up in the shape of spiral cones of various height and sizes, all of them springing from within a circle, the circumference of which was easily equal to the largest imaginable circus-ring, seemed about to unite with several pillars of water that tow-

ered hundreds of feet into the murky lead-colored sky.

The air was filled with a loud hissing noise extremely terrifying.

The cones of water spun round and round.

The hissing continued.

"What is it?" cried Orson.

"A waterspout!" howled Pierce, whose cry awakened Adrian, who crept over to where the two men were talking and gazed with fear-swept eyes at the awful conflict of the elements.

"If those cone-like columns unite in one," cried Pierce, "either this whaleboat is engulfed or every atom of mast, rigging—everything above deck—will be whirled a hundred fathoms through the air."

The bubbling spiral cones and pillars came rushing toward the whaleboat.

The air seemed charged with disaster; the waterspouts were whirling forward to engulf the frail craft.

Crack!

The sail split into a thousand bits by the souging hurricane that appeared to march before the waterspout as the mast came down to the deck in a shivering mass of splinters.

"Port! Port your helm," yelled Orson to Pierce, in the tone of a wounded lion, "or we are swamped."

CHAPTER IX.

THE GHOST FROM THE PAST.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! That was the way to end this little game, them fellers was playing," laughed Cap. Jim Wahpeton, the outlaw leader, as he sat in his cabin once more, in the depths of the Barren Lands in the musk-ox country along Wager Inlet.

"Ho! Ho! Hum!" grinned Tzintzontzan, the Eskimo bandit. "Fine, heap-dam-fine-work. All dead. Ugh!"

"Dead?" shouted Jim. "Well, I just guess yes. I have put enough strychnine in their stew-pot to kill a pack of a thousand wolves."

"That why you pout up d-o-s-e," rejoined the Eskimo, "we'n I call 't'oder day. Ugh."

"W-al-l not exactly," hesitated Jim. "I had some kinder an idea that I'd hev use for the poison, an' I mixed a big dose o' it, but I didn't go fer to doctor them people's grub—it all comes to me wen I was standin' by their dinner pot, tryin' ter figure out my next move—an' it seems t' me the best plan was to take no chanst with them fellers but to gin 'em a dose what would settle it all darnerquick. So, I jest dropped the dope in the pot; all over. They's had dinner an' are dead long ago."

"You 'scape?"

"Yep. I didn't even tell my name. Wen I draps the stuff inter the pot I makes a quick sneak and gits back to hyar—whar I fin's ye. Wall, them fellers is over."

The Eskimo was thinking intently.

He had some imagination and figured ahead a good deal.

He knew something of the trouble the deaths of Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard would make; because he was a real trapper—when he had to be honest and do some kind of work or starve—while Jim would rather starve than do any kind of work, and as a matter of fact had once or twice when his criminal career wasn't paying, nearly starved.

Jim saw the doubting look on the Eskimo's face.

"What ye thinkin' of?" asked Jim.

The Eskimo shrugged his shoulders in a doubting manner.

"I tink helluvatimeterpay," sententiously remarked the Eskimo.

"You do, eh? I don't see why?"

"P'haps not—same thing more so."

"You mean to say that even if I don't that the fact is that a mistake has been made by me in killing those men?"

"I do."

These two words came in excellent English.

Jim opened his eyes. Sometimes he wondered whether Tzintzontzan did not know more English than appeared on his tongue.

The Eskimo was wont to fall back on the cunning savage method of pretending to not understand when in reality he did thoroughly understand all that was being said in his presence.

But when he cast a suspicious glance at Tzintzontzan, the Eskimo was so cheerfully blandly impossible, so dense, so savage, that Jim decided that his surmises were merely the stuff that dreams are made of.

"Well," replied Jim, "tell why you think it foolish to kill the men?"

"You don't know whether they really hunt musk-ox or just pretend to hunt."

Jim scratched his head as he admitted this fact was true.

"You don't know," added the Eskimo, "whether they's mans come up here arter us or not—Hink Bradford, say *find out* and *no kill* unless dead sure."

Jim scratched his head deeper this time.

Tzintzontzan was right, Jim thought.

He had explicit orders as to how to proceed in the matter of the visit of the two men to musk-ox regions from Hink Bradford, and he had violated the orders and now, he had killed the enemy, and perhaps after all they were not an enemy at all, and any way, the wrath of the great organization the Hudson's Bay Company would fall on his head, for the company was really all there was to mercantile British North America.

Jim was puzzled.

As he could not break the puzzle in any way he had decided to brazen it out, with the Eskimo.

"I will take the blame," Jim said. "I know what's what. I had ter git them fellers 'cause I hed inside information that they was after us. Well, it's all over. Right or wrong they are dead."

Tzintzontzan's eyes twinkled.

He knew that Jim was bluffing.

"Anything else to do?" he asked.

Again came the decided English well spoken tone, that had so puzzled Jim.

"What is there about ye," asked Jim of the Eskimo "that makes me think that I've seen ye before?"

Tzintzontzan laughed his snakey laugh.

"Dunno! I w-o-r-k fer Hink some offenon, fer you offenon these m-a-n-y years, I tink, but I know not you some bimeby."

Which the Eskimo left Jim to translate as best he might and then some more, for the Eskimo turned into the shack, outside of which the two bandits were talking and then helped himself to a bigger drink of whiskey than most men could imbibe and stand up under, in a matter of fact way.

The drink didn't seem to hurt the Eskimo any.

In fact he seemed to thrive under its fierce glow.

Jim after awhile moodily stalked into the house himself and took a drink.

He was interrupted by a howling whirlwind in the shape of a man.

Red-faced, cursing, more a lunatic than a man, it stalked into Jim's cabin-shack and made Jim turn green with fear.

"You"—here followed words unmentionable—"where's my daughter?"

Jim shrank back.

For the speaker was Hinkley Bradford.

"Your daughter?" said Jim weakly, while his crafty, shifting eyes flew this way and that in search of a place to hide. "What do I know of your daughter?"

For answer Hink Bradford grasped the outlaw, Jim Wahpeton, by the throat and in the most matter of fact way proceeded to strangle the life out of his assistant, and active field man, of *The Brotherhood of Thieves*.

Hink was perilously near sending the soul of Jim un-ushered to another world.

Just in time Tzintzontzan wrenched Jim away from Hink and laid him on his own cot where he slunk gasping for breath, and as white as a ghost.

"Whafor you do dat?" cried the Eskimo to Hink.

"The white-livered, cracked-tooth, bow-legged, sneaking hound of a so-n of a se-a-cook," cried Hink or if he did not cry those exact words he spoke some words worse than those, "he stole my daughter Adrian!"

"Huh?" blinked the Eskimo.

"My daughter!" yelled the bandit's real leader. "He stole her away. He was looking to have me ransom her—give up money for her return!"

The Jew that Shakespeare drew could not have howled "My daughter! My ducats!" better than this British American outlaw father did.

Jim had managed to wriggle his neck a little and finding it was not off his body but still connecting his body and his head, chipped in at this point.

"I don't know nuttin' 'bout yer gal, Hink," the outlaw fawned. "I didn't steal her."

"You're a liar!"

Hink's hand stole down toward his revolver as he spoke but there was a change in his methods.

For Tzintzontzan had his gun in hand, and had it leveled at Hink's head.

"Nomakedamphoolplayanylonger!" hissed the Eskimo. "Jim he no got yar gal!"

There was "some" argument between the words and the gun, and so Hink decided to relinquish his plan of shooting-up the shack.

"But Hink," put in Jim, "how could I steal your gal—I haven't been at Grave Yard Point in six months; not sense ye sent me up hyar."

Hink turned to the Eskimo.

"Is that so?" he queried.

"Iss."

The reply from Tzintzontzan seemed to reassure Hink.

"I'll take this thief of an Eskimo's word, Jim, but I won't take yours. If Tzintzontzan tells me that's so I'll stand for it."

"It so," cried the Eskimo.

"Nuff said," returned Hink. "I was told on pretty good authority that you had taken my gal away and was holding her for ransom up here."

Jim shook his head.

"Do you think I'd double-cross ye like that, Hink?" he whined.

"Would you double-cross me," sneered Hink. "Of course ye would! You'd double-cross your own father, if you had the chance. You're so crooked that you can't lie straight in a bed."

"How you misjudge me," cried Jim. "I'll forgive you your trying to twist my neck off—here Jim whirled his head about like a turtle in the sun—" "but I can't hardly forgive the as-per-sions on my character when you said I'd double-cross ye."

"I don't say you would double-cross me, for you haint got brains enough to do that, but I said you would if you could," sneered Hink.

"Whoop!" howled Tzintzontzan.

It was his idea of a hearty laugh.

Having uttered the single word he resumed his gravity.

His laugh was brief but resounding. He liked the way Hink "handed it" to Jim.

Jim didn't relish the change the conversation had taken so he determined to worm himself back into the good graces of Hink.

"May I ask some questions?" he fawned.

"You may—I don't know whether I'll answer 'em or not," cried Hink.

"Whoop!" yelled Tzintzontzan.

He had blown-up again.

"Well," went on Jim in reckless haste. "I've got an idee that I'd like ter put to ye, if ye will listen."

The Eskimo cast one look of scorn at Jim and left the room.

He had heard of Jim's "idees" before.

Jim turned to Hink.

"Hink," he asserted, "I didn't hev no hand in stealin' yer gal, but she's dead 'all right."

Hink turned white. Tears stole to his eyes. Outlaws agent though he was his love for his daughter had been his only redeeming trait.

"What do you mean?" he whispered.

"Fore I tell ye ye must tell me sunthin," rejoined Jim.

"All right. Ask any questions you wish."

"When did your daughter disappear?"

"Two weeks ago."

"From your house at Grave Yard Point?"

"Yes."

"Were you in the house at the time?"

"No."

"Where were you?"

"Out of the hamlet on business."

"Brotherhood business?"

"Yes."

"Was there no one with your daughter—let's see what's her name?"

"Her name is Adrian Thacher Bradford. There was no one with her."

"No one at all?"

"No. There is an old Eskimo woman who stays with Adrian when I'm away on *Brotherhood* matters, and she was out of the house for awhile the night Adrian disappeared."

"Between what hours was she out of the house?"

Hink did not answer.

He gazed curiously at Jim Wahpeton.

Hink knew that in the bandits of the region there were many men whose antecedents it was better not to pry into; men who had been of the outside educated world of honest men; and it was not unusual to hear a man talk bad grammar and swear like a buccaneer one moment, who in his excitement the next would forget the polished language of the educated world he had lost, and relapse into it again.

It was this way with Jim, the outlaw.

No one knew much about Jim.

Yet he had a past, Hink saw, that trailed into the world where good manners and good language went hand in hand—and in his excitement the outlaw had relapsed into his old, close clipped, incisive words used with an understanding of their meaning and value that in the usual way Jim, the outlaw, spoke had seemed impossible.

But Hink let no trace of his inner thoughts warn Jim to desist.

So Jim went on.

"I asked between what hours on the night she disappeared was Adrian out of your house?" queried Jim.

"Between eight and nine o'clock."

"How did you learn that Adrian was out of the house from eight to nine o'clock?"

"From Old Kate, the Eskimo attendant to Adrian."

"I see. She told you?"

"Yes. She said that Adrian went out about seven o'clock—she was going down to the hamlet to get the mail, she said."

"How did the mail come in to Grave Yard Point?"

"It was the yearly steamer from Fort Churchill—got in about three o'clock that day, and had some mail for me, and for Adrian, I was told afterward by the Captain."

"I didn't think the ice was out enough to let the steamer in."

"Nor I. But it was all right. The steamer had a bunch of stuff. There were some twenty letters for Adrian. She just took hers and said I'd get mine later and then she returned to the house."

"Oh!"

"I know this from Old Kate. She says that when Adrian got back from the steamer it was about twenty minutes past eight. Then when Adrian told Old Kate about the arrival of the steamer, which is a yearly and great event with us for it brings all our supplies, and our mail to touch with the outside world, Old Kate wanted to go down to the steamer and talk with one of the Eskimo deck hands—you know that Old Kate had a son in the Hudson's Bay service as a guide at Fort Churchill and she wanted to see if any one on the steamer could tell her about her son for she had not heard from him in a long while."

"I see."

"Old Kate says that at first Adrian tried to dissuade her from going to the steamer on account of the lateness of the hour. But she says, that she pointed out to Adrian that it was then almost nine o'clock, and added that she could go to the boat and back again by ten o'clock at the outside."

"Ah?"

"So Adrian at length acceded to the demands of Old Kate."

"She allowed her to go to the steamer?"

"She did."
 "Old Kate went?"
 "Yes."
 "Leaving Adrian alone in your house?"
 "Yes."
 "What time did Old Kate return?"
 "Promptly at ten o'clock, she says."
 "Oh! Was Adrian home?"
 "Old Kate says she had taken a duplicate key to the front door, and so she let herself in carefully."
 "She did, eh?"
 "She did."
 "Were the lights burning in the house?"
 "Just as usual."
 "Was Adrian home?"
 "There was no one in the house."
 "Had Adrian retired?"

"The bed in her room looked as if it was occupied, but Adrian was gone."

"What did she wear?"
 "A black dress, a sort of riding habit, and her usual other clothing."

"There had been no preparation for a journey?"
 "Not in the least. Everything that Adrian had on when she left was just what she usually would wear about Grave Yard Point at this season of the year. Her room was undisturbed. Her clothes were all there. There was not a thing that in any way suggested an idea on the part of my daughter that she was going to leave the house or in fact had left it."

"Then she did not run away with any one?"
 "Sure. There's only ten white men in Grave Yard Point. I've located every one of them. All are accounted for—without her."

"Was there no note left?"
 "None."
 "Not a line in the girl's handwriting to throw some light on this mystery?"
 "None."

Jim hesitated. In his pocket was a bit of the gown of Adrian with her monogram "A. T. B." upon it, which he had so stealthily as to defy detection, taken from the camp, where he had, as he thought, assassinated Pierce and his party.

Further thought decided Jim that at present he had better not tell, what he thought he could prove by the monogram, that Adrian was dead, to her distracted father; it might mean another choking bee.

He also thought it not wise to say, just yet, much about the murder, as he thought he had accomplished one, or rather several, when he dropped the strychnine capsule in the dinner of Pierce and his party—let all the sleeping dogs lie, was the policy of Jim just then.

"Well, it's a mystery alright," said Hink heaving a deep sigh.

Even to Jim, it was a mystery, but he thought he would try one more question.

"Have you received anything that would make you fear you had a secret enemy?"

"N-o—," slowly replied Hink. "No-o, not unless you can call something queer that I got about two weeks or so before my daughter disappeared—it was in—well, it was nothing. I look upon it as a practical kind of joke, so don't connect it in any way. I'm sure it has nothing to do with Adrian's disappearance."

Jim was all ears now.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "What is it? Let me see what it is! I don't care how unimportant it looks it will be found to be important, I'm sure."

Hink hesitated a moment.

Then he handed Jim something that froze the blood in the outlaw's veins and left him white and speechless.

After all it was only a sheet of paper showing a rough drawing of the right hand of a man with the middle finger missing.

"It's the hand of Three Fingered Jack," groaned the outlaw, while he shuddered in dreadful fear. "The old trapper spirited the daughter away!"

"What!" screamed Hink Bradford. "You villain, you told me that Three Fingered Jack is dead!"

"He is," murmured the frightened outlaw.

CHAPTER X.

A SPLENDID SHOT.

"See the thing whirl round!"

"It seems to rise to a dreadful height."

"It would drown us in this frail whaleboat if it bursts near us!"

In rapid succession Pierce Gifford, Orson Hubbard, and the fair girl, Adrian Bradford, said the foregoing words as they watched the awesome and dangerous waterspout as it went whirling in immense circles over the waters of Hudson Bay.

The spiral cones were marching around like military companies, each every moment looking as if they would engulf the party in their dancing depths.

The rays of the sun invested the falling spray in indescribable beauty.

"What made it?" asked Orson as he watched the wonderful scene.

"Waterspouts are the whirlwinds of the sea," replied Pierce. "They are caused by different rotations of winds, or by ascending columns of heated air. In their ascending the different currents of air come in contact with each other and this results in eddies. Then they whirl backward or forward as propelled by surface air."

"Isn't the water of the bay being sucked up into the clouds?" asked Adrian.

"No. That's a popular fallacy. Spray from the broken waves, caused by the violent disturbance of the base of the waterspout may be carried up to some rain clouds that are hanging low—our danger here is in the turbulent sea at the base of the waterspout, or when it breaks there may be so much spray in it that it will swamp us."

"Is there danger?" asked Orson.

"Extreme," came the quick reply. "It's in fact very dangerous indeed. If we can't get away from the vicinity of the waterspout I'm afraid we will be lost."

The waterspout continued to hiss ominously.

The spiral cones continued to whirl about in deadly significance. The staring travellers expected every moment that they would see the columns unite and then come whirling down to destroy them.

As if the waterspout was a great snake possessing the basilisk power of fascinating its prey by the glare of its eye, the travelers found they could not look away from the fearful spectacle.

The dancing waterspout would whirl away as if about to waltz over the sea in gigantic rhythm.

"There it goes!" Orson would howl.

"No," contradicted Adrian. "It's coming this way again!"

With a roar that could be heard miles the waterspout would come whirling toward the boat—the craft would rock and tip as if getting ready to dive to destruction in the depths below.

But the waterspout like the serpent seemed to toy with its prey.

Instead of engulfing the travelers it would hurry away again to soon repeat to the dismay of all, the remarkable performance.

It was impossible for those in the boat to get the sail to draw wind for the wind eddied in so many different currents that the canvas had no chance to fill; and with the roaring hissing sound from the waterspout, the ship danced up and down.

Now the bow of the whaleboat stood up in the air as if about to hit the sky; the next moment the stem of the boat almost buried itself in the seething waves.

"If this continues much longer," shouted Pierce, "we can't keep afloat. It seems to me every moment that we will sink."

"That's right," cried Orson. "I can almost feel the whaleboat split underneath us!"

"I never saw a waterspout on Hudson Bay before!" interrupted Adrian.

"Neither did I," returned Pierce. "They are rare without doubt in these latitudes but I have heard that they had them. In fact, I know that Blue Wing when he was alive told me that he had seen one or two, in his life—the conflict between summer and winter just now, makes warm currents of air; these evidently have caused the waterspout to form."

"Look! Look!" cried Orson at this juncture.

Spellbound the wayfarers gazed.

Several of the cones and columns suddenly joined forces and all united into a gigantic spout that towered up into the blue, black sky above and as though by magnetic attraction with a rapidly increasing spiral motion the colossal column came whirling down upon the unhappy people in the frail whaleboat.

The waterspout's movements were preceded by a roaring as of a thousand locomotives.

The surface of the bay appeared now to be of a strong, dull white color.

"Lost!" shouted Orson. "The waterspout is bound to sink us!"

The fated column of hissing spray, water, wind and violence bore down at frightful speed on the whaleboat as Orson spoke.

In desperation hardly knowing what he was doing Orson raised his rifle which lay at his feet, and began pumping shot after shot at the waterspout as if his magazine gun could stay it by slaughtering it, as if it was a wild beast of the forest.

The effect was, however, electrical.

The waterspout hesitated.

It stopped.

Pierce seeing the effect of his friend's shots caught up his rifle and began making it bellow like a frightened powder-magazine.

Adrian started her automatic revolver going and the popping, and banging and the smoke was startling even to those making all the noise and vapor.

"Keep at it all," cried Pierce over the tumult. "Look!"

Even as he spoke the two or three remaining sepa-

rate cones and the great column rushed together with a tremendous crash.

They whirled around in a dizzy dance, and then in one great roar the entire immense waterspout collapsed, with a noise that resembled the fall of a steeple and with a great shower of spray subsided into the waters of the bay.

It was an entrancing sight.

The blue black sky seemed to push backward, letting through a wide burst of the sun, the wind fell with perfect drawing power into the sail of the whaleboat and the whaleboat, about one third filled with water, went sailing merrily away, like a daughter of old Father Neptune, himself.

Drenched to the skin as they were, the three passengers in the boat set up a triumphant yell.

"Why didn't I think of that?" yelled Pierce.

"That—what?" cried Orson.

"Think of what you did," replied Pierce. "That's the way Blue Wing told me to get busy with a gun or revolver if I got tangled up with a waterspout. They say, that the shots hurtling through the air, change the currents that keep the waterspout alive, and then it falls by its own weight—we are surely under Divine care. No man himself, could possibly have evaded such unexpected and dreadful dangers as an attempt to assassinate us by poisoning us, and by the onslaught of one of nature's most terrifying spectacles."

"They must be dangerous if you get in the way of one?" said Adrian, referring to the waterspout.

"Indeed they are," replied Pierce, "our boat would have been ground to atoms in that spiral compression and we would have been drowned at once had the waterspout hit us."

"Well, thank God we are safe!" the girl replied. "It would seem as if we were being cared for by a Higher Power as you say—no mere man could face a waterspout as we did and live under it."

"I don't know why I fired at the thing," said Orson. "I suppose it was the last gasp of a man who is so used to fighting for life unexpectedly that he shoots even when he knows his last moment has come. I just felt that column of water was going to drown me, and I had a hateful feeling that I'd pop it a bit of lead before I went—the same idea that makes a man draw his gun after he has been shot mortally and fire it at his companion, who has just shot him."

"A curious thing about all such things I remember," said Pierce, "was in the assassination of Wild Bill Hickok, the best of the old time West gun-men, who was assassinated at Deadwood, over in the States, some years ago. Wild Bill was sitting in at a card game when a pretty hard cuss, named Jack McCall slipped up behind Bill, placed a gun to the back of Bill's head and let him have it. Now the ball went through Wild Bill's brain, out of his cheek, and over into another man's arm who was playing across the table with Bill. Yet, shot through the brain as he was, killed without doubt instantaneously as he was, Wild Bill before he tumbled over pulled his two guns half way out of the holsters, where he carried them, and when he was raised both his hands grasped his weapons."

"Game to the last second, eh?" said Adrian.

"Not exactly that, but of course that," replied Pierce. "But he was a man who was used to gun-fights—he had killed eighty-five men in such fights in his life."

But his last breath was to 'get-back' at the enemy whom he didn't really know had shot him—it's the last thing that leaves a man when he dies up here the desire to 'get-back.' That's why Orson shot at the waterspout."

"I guess you're right," the girl cried. "That's what makes real men! Fight, and 'get back,' is the whole story of a life for a man to adopt. Never give up. If Orson had given up, we would now be floating on the surface of Hudson Bay dead, with our boat also the prey to the waves—in the very last second before obliteration came to us, Orson pumped his lead out of his gun—result——"

"Over the summer sea, with glad hearts, gay and free, singing glad melody, each heart to gladden," sang Pierce, in a voice not much better than that of a crow, and who also didn't quite know his words correctly.

Orson who had been bailing out the boat grinned as he winked at Adrian.

"Our leader," he cried, "is a *tenore robusto damifino whatheissingingo*."

"Another case of throwing pearls before——" calmly retorted Pierce.

Before he could speak further Orson made a noise like a pig.

"That's it," cried Pierce, "You're on to my meaning!"

Adrian laughed.

"That's the way, gentlemen," she cried, "take your troubles with a merry jest and don't let it get deep in your heart? A trouble laughed at is a trouble half turned into a bit of good luck."

"What an almanac writer she would make—'About Dec. 1st, expect snow; The Wise Man Buyeth a Snow-Shovel,'" retorted Orson.

Adrian chuckled.

"Now then," she cried, "while you two preservers of all my grace and beauty are making fun for me, if you don't stop playing for me, and attend to your boat, you'd better fit the boat with snow-shoes."

"Why?" asked Orson.

"Then the boat can walk over that snow-drift dead ahead, that you seem aiming to hit."

Pierce who had forgotten to keep track of the direction in which the whaleboat was going let her off a point or two; this rounded the craft in a neat little bay, where with a rattle Orson let a small anchor drop, and the boat veered up into the wind, and floated nicely and easily.

"What next?" said Orson when the boat had eased itself.

"I've been hunted long enough," replied Pierce in a deadly tone.

"Ah," said Adrian, knowing that Pierce meant more than he said.

Pierce picked up his rifle and sighted it.

"Yes," he added in a low tone. "I've been hunted long enough. I am going ashore soon—but I've turned hunter."

There was a spark of purpose in Pierce's eye that seemed to kindle an answering spark in the eyes of Orson and Adrian.

"Good," they replied together. "We will help you turn outlaw hunter!"

There was a bull-dog air about Pierce as he nodded in grim determination.

CHAPTER XI.

THREE FINGERED JACK'S GHOST.

The door bore the splashy sign of a hand. The middle finger of the hand was missing; it left the impression of only three fingers.

At a glance Captain Jim Wahpeton, working chief of the *Brotherhood of Thieves* saw these facts.

His face turned white as chalk.

His jaw fell.

His trembling finger pointed to the impression on the door of his shack and Hinkley Bradford, actual chief of the *Brotherhood* in amazement saw the grewsome sight.

Hink's nerves were in better shape than those of Jim's.

He had not rushed so much whiskey down his throat as his field assistant.

But even Hink was staggered.

The two outlaws looked oddly enough at each other. "W-h-a-t-t," said Hink. "W-h-a-t-t do you think that is-s?"

"It's-s the sign that Three Fingered Jack, the trapper set, when I kil-l-e-d-d him," whimpered Jim, like a school-boy caught in a fault.

Hink curiously gazed at the impression on the door. *It was made in blood.*

There was no question of that fact.

The blood was drip, dripping down the side of the door, in little pools and rivulets as Hink looked at it.

It quavered and wavered here and there following the grain of the wood, until it coagulated in a tiny pool at the bottom of the door on the sill.

The bloody traces were plain of a hand with the middle finger missing; it showed plainly that the hand was a right one and from the size that the hand was that of a brawny man.

In spite of himself a superstitious feeling of awe swept over Hink.

There was something supernatural about the mystery.

The two bandits had been talking together in the shack; they came out, and there was the mark of a bloody hand on the door, just where the latch was fixed.

"Who ever made that remark," calculated Hink, "was trying to open the latch to that door!"

"Yes," faltered Jim. "When I hit the trapper-r, Three-e Fingered-d Jack-k, on the head with my gun-n butt, he put his hand up to his head-d. It was his right hand-d with the middle finger-r all missing-g. It came away all bloody—and——"

Hink shuddered.

The wind seemed to grow cold; the sun went behind the clouds; the landscape appeared to take on an ugly murderous tinge.

"Go on," cried Hink, in a small low voice, unlike his usual bellowing tones.

"Then Three Fingered Jack tumbled over," added Jim, the outlaw, speaking as if he was in a trance and the words were being dragged out of him by some unknown and irresistible force.

"Yes," groaned Hink.

"It was right in this shack it all happened. This is Three Fingered Jack, the trapper's shack," droned on Jim. "I thought he was dead when I had hit him. He lay right there where your foot is."

Hink moved away quickly staring at the fatal spot.

"Three Fingered Jack lay there," continued Jim, as if making a confession of murder, whether he wished to do so or not. "I began to look over his furs. There was one with a price on it I coveted. *It was a silver gray fox skin.*"

"Yes," cried Hink. "You sent the skin to me."

"There was a *marten skin* lay next to the *silver gray fox skin*," added Jim.

"Yes. I remember that skin also."

"Just as I was looking at this skin," cried Jim, "Three Fingered Jack came back to life. I saw him rise. He rushed over to the skin I held. He grasped it in his bloody right hand. I tore it away from him. I struck him once more. He did not rise again."

Hink's face wore a startled look.

He whirled around at Jim.

"What did you do with that bloody skin?" roared Hink.

"I sent it to you."

Hink's face worked savagely.

"You took out the bloody marks, didn't you now, before you sent it to me?"

"No-o."

"What?"

"No-o."

Hink stood dazed by the rush of thoughts that came to him.

"Did you notice the skin?" cried Hink, "before you shipped it?"

"Yes-s."

"What did it show?"

"It showed the plain marks of Three Fingered Jack's hand on the skin."

The answer positively stunned Hink.

With his mouth open, his face white, his arms still half raised in protest Hink stood for several seconds as if carved from stone.

Then he spoke.

"Jim," he said, weakly, "why didn't you send word to me of all this? Do you know what I've done?"

"I can't-t imagine-e," fluttered Jim.

"I sold the skins, all of them, all of the plunder in the way of peltries that you stole from Three Fingered Jack, to Pierce Gifford, the grader and buyer for the Hudson's Bay Company at Grave Yard Point."

Open mouthed Jim, the outlaw, stared at Hink.

In a flash he saw where the sale left him.

"Three Fingered Jack worked for the Hudson's Bay Company!" he cried.

"Yes."

"He got his last 'debt' from them?"

"Yes."

"That's why Pierce Gifford and Orson Hubbard, closed up their station at Grave Yard Point and came out here!"

"Undoubtedly."

"They were after us?"

Hink was shrewd.

He caught the inflection of Jim's voice, which argued that he was holding back something.

"Why do you say *were after us*?" Hink asked.

A fiendish look of gratified revenge swept over Jim, the outlaw's face.

"They are all dead!" he cried, "I killed them!"

Hink's face was wreathed in smiles.

"Good! Good!" he cried. "How—tell me about it?"

"I poisoned the entire party with strychnine," laughed Jim, now in high good humor and beginning to recover from his fear, caused by the mysterious bloody finger marks on the doorway of the home where he had lurked, cowardly assassin that he was, in wait for unfortunate Three Fingered Jack, the trapper.

"Poisoned them? How?"

Jim told the terrible tale of the assassin's stealthy and cowardly deed.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Great!" cried Hink. "That settles it! The game is ours! We win! Dead men don't ever come back and cough up in court. We are safe. We get the hoodle—we—"

The words died in the bandit usurer's throat.

Tzintzontzan squelched his ghoulish glee in a breath.

"I see, Pierce Gifford, Orson Hubbard, and Eskimo boy, jest anchor boat," the Eskimo said. "They come 'shore long with many guns. They look fight."

"Alive?" groaned Hink. "Those men alive and after us?"

"No!" howled the craven outlaw, Jim Wahpeton, "they are come back with Three Fingered Jack from the grave to haunt me!"

With a wild yell Jim fell to the ground in the terrors of an epileptic fit, foaming at the mouth, grinding his teeth, rolling his eyes, and with his heels drumming on the ground a picture of horror.

Hink paid no attention to him.

"Trapped!" he sighed as he sank to the earth, a fearful mass of cowardice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

"Come on!" cried Pierce, as he left the whaleboat moored safely under a sheltering rock that jutted out over the bay near where he, Orson Hubbard and Adrian had landed.

"Come where?" cried Orson in return.

"I want to get up on the ridge of rocks that will let me look about a trifle," replied Pierce Gifford. "It is the highest ground around the bay here. We can get our bearings."

"This is a good plan," spoke up Adrian. "It seems to me that we had better get to high ground. We can spy out the land thus, and see if there's any hostile counter-plot being aimed at us."

"Well, the only objection to that will be that we will be seen," added Orson.

"Yes," replied Adrian with fine sarcasm, "there might be prying eyes about and Mrs. Grundy might make up quite a scandal out of my presence here."

"There's secrets and silence in the mysterious country about us—but no scandal, Adrian," cried Pierce.

"Then it don't make much difference whether we are seen or not," the girl replied with spirit.

"Only the difference between a bullet in one's body and out of it."

Orson chuckled as he spoke.

"Any way, push ahead," impatiently said the girl. "I want to face the dangers ahead rather than sit here awaiting them to arrive on my scene."

Accordingly the party scrambled over rocks, stones, dirt, more rocks, more stones, a Barren Land indeed.

"If I was a self-respecting musk-ox I'd shake this country right after I got here and saw what it contained in the way of food," remarked Pierce. "Hey, what's that?"

He pointed as he spoke to a bit of white paper that was fluttering in the wind.

"How did a bit of white paper get there," added Pierce—"no, it's not a paper. By Jove, what is it?"

"It's a skull," cried Adrian whose eyes were quick and bright. "I can see the cross-bones below the skull."

Pierce rushed forward.

There was a human skull lying on a rock; and the cross bones, below it were partly attached to a tiny stunted fir tree, and from the hollow distorted eye of the skull a tiny string or thread was seen to fall and then as far as the eye could reach, meandered back toward the snow-covered rocks further inland.

Pierce studied the queer scene for several minutes without saying one word.

Then he spoke.

"The bones of yonder dead man must tell me the story behind this mystery," Pierce said at length.

He hurried forward and picked up the thread.

"Forward!" Pierce added. "We will follow this mystery now that we have one end of the tangled skein to its ending."

The party hurried with fleet steps forward.

The going was dreadful.

They had fed their dogs, and tied them in a sheltered place between two rocky points, knowing that an Arctic dog is as comfortable as if in the finest warmest house, with snow ten feet deep, if he is only fed.

"Is this a winter scene, or a summer scene?" gasped Adrian as the party reached a spot further inland where she could gaze about.

Here and there, the girl saw long patches of deep snow; then there would be a strip where the sun touched the earth where it looked like a summer scene.

"It seems to me," she added after some thought, "if I were betting that I would wager that it was winter here more than it is summer—what a desolate spot!"

"It certainly is desolate. No man could live here long, unless he had to, and like living in some places, that's the only reason."

"What's the only reason?"

"That you have to."

Pierce who had been a few feet away while Orson and Adrian joked, now hailed them.

"This confounded string seems to end here," he cried.

"Are you sure?" yelled back Orson.

"Dead sure. Come over and look," replied Pierce.

The party rushed over at speed.

They saw that Pierce was not mistaken.

The string undoubtedly ended on the top of a flat rock that seemed to weigh several hundreds of tons, and to have been where it lay for unnumbered ages.

"Here's where the string ends," cried Pierce, "sure enough!"

"A regular April Fool's joke," disgustedly remarked Orson.

"Don't be too sure about it," said practical Adrian.

"Have you tried to lift the rock?"

Pierce was amused.

"No," he replied, "nor have I tried to raise yonder mountain which towers into the sky with its bald head covered with a vast wig of snow."

"Well," answered Adrian. "I wouldn't say I

couldn't lift the mountain unless I knew that I had tried; and found I couldn't."

Pierce laughed.

"You're all right," he cried to the girl, "now watch me do the Atlas act of hoisting the World on my shoulder."

While speaking Pierce caught hold of the flat-rock expecting that he had no more chance of raising it up, than if he had tried to lift the entire world.

He gave a tug.

Up came the rock and over went Pierce on his back.

The rock did not weigh five pounds.

"Our modern strong man," shouted Orson, striking an attitude and pointing to the prostrate Pierce. "He yanks up a rock that weighs hundreds of tons more or less, while you wait, putting so much force in the work that he pulls the whole shooting-match on top of him. The only strong man in the wilds of British North-Meri'kee!"

"Now wasn't I right?" called Adrian. "It was, as we all see, a matter that required only some effort."

"Effort to do what? Lift the rock or regain my equilibrium?" queried Pierce.

"Now, both," replied Adrian. "For it required 'sand' to try and lift the rock, when you were sure you couldn't, and 'dirt,' to brush off yourself when you found you could—and tumbled head over heels in the height of your achievement."

"Yes," returned Pierce. "I've pulled the rock of ages up and what do we find?"

Adrian made a quick rush at the surface of the earth displayed under the rock.

"Here is something!" she called, "it's some figures."

"Let me see," replied Orson.

His eyes scanned the figures which were written on the bit of paper which Adrian had handed to him.

This is what he read:

4; 14; 22; 23 N

12; 16; 44; 52 W

1; 8; 6; 2; S

"I suppose when we get that all translated it will reveal something that we want to know—how a fool gets a fool's payment for his foolishness," sneered Orson.

"It's a practical joke," added Pierce.

But Adrian shook her head.

"I don't think so," she said. "How could there be a practical joke up here? Who in the world is there to play a practical joke," she remarked calmly. "A joke would be unappreciated save among the musk-oxen, and are there any here? If there are I haven't seen any. It's so desolate up here that I guess they all have decided that it don't pay to run up here any more—no, that's not a practical joke. No man would play a joke in a place where there's no one to joke with. That's put there for a reason. Now who has a reason to communicate with any one up here?"

"I don't know," said Pierce.

"That's a secret instruction code," cried the girl. "I feel it!"

The two men crowded each other to get near where they would not lose a word Adrian said.

"Yes," she continued, "I feel sure that I am right. It's simple too—elementary in every way—for it's a set of directions rather than a code for certain lawless men, who have been interested in this part of the

world—or it's a set of directions to any one that might come here."

Adrian looked like an inspired prophetess as she spoke. Her blue eyes were almost black with excitement. Her fair hair fell in natural curls over her low, broad brow, her face was lighted up with the feelings within her that she was on the eve of a portentous discovery—she was without doubt the prettiest girl that Pierce or Orson had ever seen.

Adrian went on.

"I've got a plan! It strikes me that after all, this message is very simple," she said. "Orson, will you take four moderate paces North from that point where Pierce pulled up the rock so very, very gracefully?"

Pierce walked away with a sniff. Orson, however, put himself in line.

"I don't know which is North and which isn't," he marked.

Pierce who had seen the situation coming, betrayed in the words of Orson had gone over merely to get a compass from his coat.

"That's North," he indicated by a sweep of his arm.

Counting slowly as he went along, Orson soon had four moderate paces, that is moderate as to length of steps, measured off.

"Order No. 2," Orson cried with triumph to Adrian. "What is it?"

The girl consulted her bit of paper.

"Now run 14 more steps," she cried.

This was done.

"Now then," she said, "add 22 to that!"

This also was quickly done.

By this time Orson was a long way off.

"Adrian," he shouted, "get me a telephone. When you get to the next stepping numbers I'll need one. I'm two feet from hearing you now."

"Take 23 steps more," the girl cried.

"Twenty-three for mine," howled Orson. "One more step and I'm in the bay!"

Pierce, who was an interested observer but did not think that the plan of Adrian was coming to anything, laughed.

But Adrian insisted.

She put Orson through the stipulated number of steps indicated in the chart in the direction of West and South.

"There's only two steps to take," cried the girl finally, when the last number South was taken.

As she did so she looked back over the route that Orson had taken shown by his tracks in the soft earth.

While there was many steps here and there that were superfluous, Adrian saw that the general direction in spite of the confusion of the different North, South and West directions had been toward the up-land behind them and that the last two steps took them to the top of a little rocky hill.

"Wait a minute, Orson," she cried. "What will we see when we take those last two steps that will allow us to see over the hill into the valley beyond?"

"We had better get to where we can all be together when we take those last two steps," suggested Pierce. "Lord only knows what we will find concealed behind that hill."

Orson started forward to make the last two steps.

The others ranged themselves by his side to also take the last two steps. Was what they were going to see a message from the dead?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF THE BROTHERHOOD.

"You cur, you sneaking dog, you liver-colored pup, get up!"

Hinkley Bradford yelled these words with a kick one at a time, to the cringing body of the outlaw, Jim Wahpeton.

Hink had recovered his wits a few minutes after his brain told him of his danger from the weapons of Pierce and Orson.

He resolved immediately to fight to the last gasp.

"There's two of them," he cried, "there's three of us, counting the Eskimo Tzintzontzan. If we three outlaws can't do up those callow young men, who don't know anything at all about gun play, we ought to fall down before them and let them kill us."

Hink's thought then was that after the victory he was sure to gain, he assured himself, it was better for him to flee the territory as fast as he could.

"I've been riding for this fall some time," he said. "I have placed enough cash to get myself all the comforts of a home with trimmings far, far away from these wilds—I'll fight those chaps, Pierce and Orson, off, and then make my jump."

As for *The Brotherhood of Thieves* Hink cared nothing.

"They probably have got at different points where they are doing business a good deal of loot," Hink argued. "What of it? They are welcome to what they can get. I've done up out of anything but the little end; and I've made that end as little as I thought the band would stand for without a struggle. I've got away with about all there is of the boodle. The rest can go hang with the outlaws! My bit is placed out where no one but me can get it!"

Intent, therefore, in making the best of a bad situation Hink tried to rouse some kind of feeling in Jim, the outlaw.

"Get up!" he howled.

Jim shook his head.

"No use," he groaned. "I'm a dead man!"

"Dead? You're better than ten dead men now," argued Hink. "Get up."

This was punctuated by another kick.

"Get up!"

Still another kick.

It was no use. Hink saw that after awhile. Jim Wahpeton, outlaw leader, was a hopeless wreck, and that was all.

How to hearten him into a fighting mood was something that even Hink Bradford despaired of, and he was not built of despairing stuff.

Hink called to Tzintzontzan.

The Eskimo came rather haltingly with his face bent low as if in pain.

"You're scared too, are ye?" sneered Hink. "Ye yellin' skinned son of a seal, go and bring a bottle of whiskey and give this infernal coward a drink!"

The Eskimo without a word turned and entered the cabin-shack where he and Jim had lived in such close communion so many months alone.

The Eskimo soon returned with a bottle of whiskey. He poured out a stiff drink and gave it to Jim, the outlaw, still with his face held low.

Jim the outlaw swallowed the fatal stuff.

"Gimme a drink too," shouted Hink.

Tzintzontzan slunk over to Hink.

He handed him the whiskey bottle with averted face. Hink took it.

Then he gave a scream of fear.

For on the white label of the bottle there appeared, blotchy, but plain, the faint outlines of a man's right hand with the middle finger missing.

Again the fearful yell of fear came from the lips of Hinkley Bradford.

Tzintzontzan, the Eskimo thug, raised his head and gave one long, fiendish stare at Hink.

"My God!" shrieked Hink. "It's Three Fingered Jack!"

The great, burly self sufficient leader of the *Brotherhood of Thieves* when he saw the awful face that lowered at him with eyes burning with hate, now no longer the face of the Eskimo, Tzintzontzan, but of that of the missing Three Fingered Jack, turned and fled into the depths of the silent hills of the Barren Lands, a man crazed with fear.

When Hink shrieked the name of Three Fingered Jack, Jim Wahpeton, the outlaw, heard it.

He tried to rise but a terrible pain assailed him.

He tried to open his mouth to speak but his jaws were firmly locked.

Through his frame there swept the horrible spasmotic contraction that comes when death by strychnine poisoning has begun its torments.

Jim let one scream of dreadful agony escape him.

"Poisoned," he yelled. "Help! Help!"

His dying eyes turned to meet those of Three Fingered Jack.

"He is dead, yet he has come here and poisoned me," wailed the dying outlaw.

Jim tried to rise. A fearful spasm wracked his tortured frame.

He fell back a corpse.

The Brotherhood of Thieves was at an end.

One of its leaders was flying into the silence, the mystery, and the secret places where a man's life goes out in fear and dread.

The other of its leaders lay dead from the strychnine that he had tried to kill others with.

"Retribution!" cried the figure of a man standing on a hill directly back of the horrible scene.

The form was that of Three Fingered Jack.

Was it he?

No one really knows. Three Fingered Jack passed thus into the same silence that shielded the fate of Hinkley Bradford.

Neither Three Fingered Jack or Hinkley Bradford were ever seen in this world again by mortal eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCENE DISCLOSED.

The three daring young people took the fatal two steps ahead.

"It's a two-step all around," laughed Orson.

"Look! Look! See! There's a man lying in front of a cabin," cried Adrian oblivious to the words of Orson.

"Ah," said Pierce with deep meaning. "I see."

"You see what?" queried Orson. "You're always seeing things. Can't you fix things so that we all can see?"

Pierce did not reply.

His eyes were trying to read the picture before him.

"I see a shack and a dead man lying before it—ah, I begin to understand."

As Pierce spoke he spelled out the story in an imperfect way.

"That's undoubtedly the haunt of the outlaws here," he cried. "Look! There's a canoe drawn up!"

"That's my canoe, the one I was brought here in, I feel sure," said Adrian. "You remember, boys, I told you both at the place where you found me that when I awoke the day after my abduction—if it was an abduction—that I was brought there I thought in my own canoe, because it was there when I awoke."

"Yes, Yes," said both the young men together. "We remember just what you said."

"Oh, say, for God's sake, look there?" interrupted Orson.

His hand was pointing to a figure they could plainly see standing alone over on a slight hill directly opposite them and behind the shack in the foreground.

Pierce looked.

"It's Three Fingered Jack," roared Pierce. "Alive, by thunder!"

Led by Pierce the three ran with all their might down the little valley and up the hill where they had seen the figure of the missing trapper Three Fingered Jack.

But when they reached the spot that the figure had occupied there was no figure there.

"What's this?" cried Pierce, as he looked around him.

There was nothing in sight save the barren hills, the snow-clad mountains, the wide-solitary, lonely stretch of the great Hudson Bay.

"Jack must be hiding," said Adrian in a voice that she tried to make matter of fact.

But it trembled with some secret feeling she dared not voice.

"Search down the hill the other side there," suggested Orson.

There was nothing there either.

The trio of friends became desperate.

They separated at Orson's suggestion and began going over the ground carefully.

Nothing was to be seen.

The same silence, the same awesome appalling loneliness was all that greeted them on either side.

"Possibly there may be a solution of this mystery down at the shack," suggested Pierce.

"Let's all go there and see."

They hurried down to the shack.

They saw the form of the dead outlaw, Jim Wahpeton, still, with the light of eternity surrounding him now; he had been an outlaw; now he was only a dead man.

"He has gone to a higher Judge than we can be," said Pierce as he stood by the side of the dead man, whose distorted face, told all how he had died.

"Poisoned," whispered Orson.

"Yes," replied Pierce. "He is dead of strychnine with which he tried to murder us."

Then the three with white faces passed around by the fearfully distorted corpse, even now bloated and repulsive in death.

There lay a canoe.

"Is it yours?" asked Pierce of Adrian in a low tone.

Adrian examined it.

"Yes," she said.

Pierce merely nodded.

They entered the shack.

It was a scene of ruin and desolation that faced them.

The entire place had been wrecked apparently by some unknown force.

In the center of the room upon the floor there lay a dead man.

It was Tzintzontzan, the Eskimo thug.

His face was set in an expression of horror.

"I wonder what he saw before he died?" said Orson to Pierce.

"How did he die?" questioned Adrian.

Pierce pointed to the neck of the corpse.

There, all saw, about the dead Eskimo's neck, the plain mark of blood stained fingers.

The middle finger of the hand made no mark.

"Three Fingered Jack strangled that Eskimo to death," cried Orson. "But where is Three Fingered Jack?"

The question was not answered.

It never has been answered.

For the grave holds many unanswerable secrets.

"What do you suppose we saw?" queried Orson after the two dead outlaws had been buried in hastily constructed graves by the two men.

"Oh, I can not tell," rejoined Pierce.

"I am sure we saw the form of Three Fingered Jack there," whispered Adrian.

"I don't know. There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of by some of us. I also think I saw Three Fingered Jack on earth, but ah me, my friends, no human tongue can ever tell the mystery that lies behind the dreadful scenes we have had partly revealed to us to-day."

"Who do you suppose set that labyrinth to lead us here?" whispered Orson.

"Alas, I can not tell. Yet, it served its purpose in bringing us here. Friends all, I am not going to try to pierce the veil that shadows the real from the unreal—suffice it for me that the *Brotherhood of Thieves* through *The Fur Trader's Discovery* is broken up!"

"But how did I become marooned on that barren spot where you found me?" asked Adrian.

"My child," cried Pierce, "you may have gone there in your sleep. Many strange things have been told of those who walk in their sleep—the outlaw, Jim Wahpeton, may have carried you there for purposes that, with the journey, if he was the one that carried you, are hidden now in his dead brain."

There was no use of further attempts to delve into the mystery all saw.

The return to the hamlet of Grave Yard Point was made without trouble.

For a long time Adrian awaited the return of her father, but nothing was ever heard of him again.

No trace was ever had of the great fortune which he was suspected of leaving hidden in some safe place in the great financial districts of many large cities of the world.

There was a snug little fortune found in the financial centers of the North-West, and Adrian used often to say to her husband, Pierce Gifford, "that enough was quite as good as too much" in the money line.

To which Orson Hubbard, who now was a Fur trader on his own hook, used to reply with a twinkle in his eye:

"But what you have is nothing to what the *Brotherhood of Thieves* really made!"

Often all three, who were always great friends, spoke of the mystery surrounding the death of Three Fingered Jack.

They never could come to any point where they felt that they had solved the mystery, although they presented many explanations to each other at various times.

There is so much that is silent and secret in the fastnesses of the great North-West.

THE END.

* * * * *

The three friends made a careful search of the shack. There was not much that they could piece out of the wreck of the place.

They saw that the cabin had been once inhabited by Three Fingered Jack. They also saw that it had been inhabited by the outlaw, Captain Jim Wahpeton and Tzintzontzan.

That was all.

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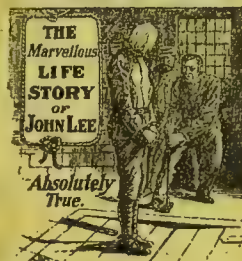
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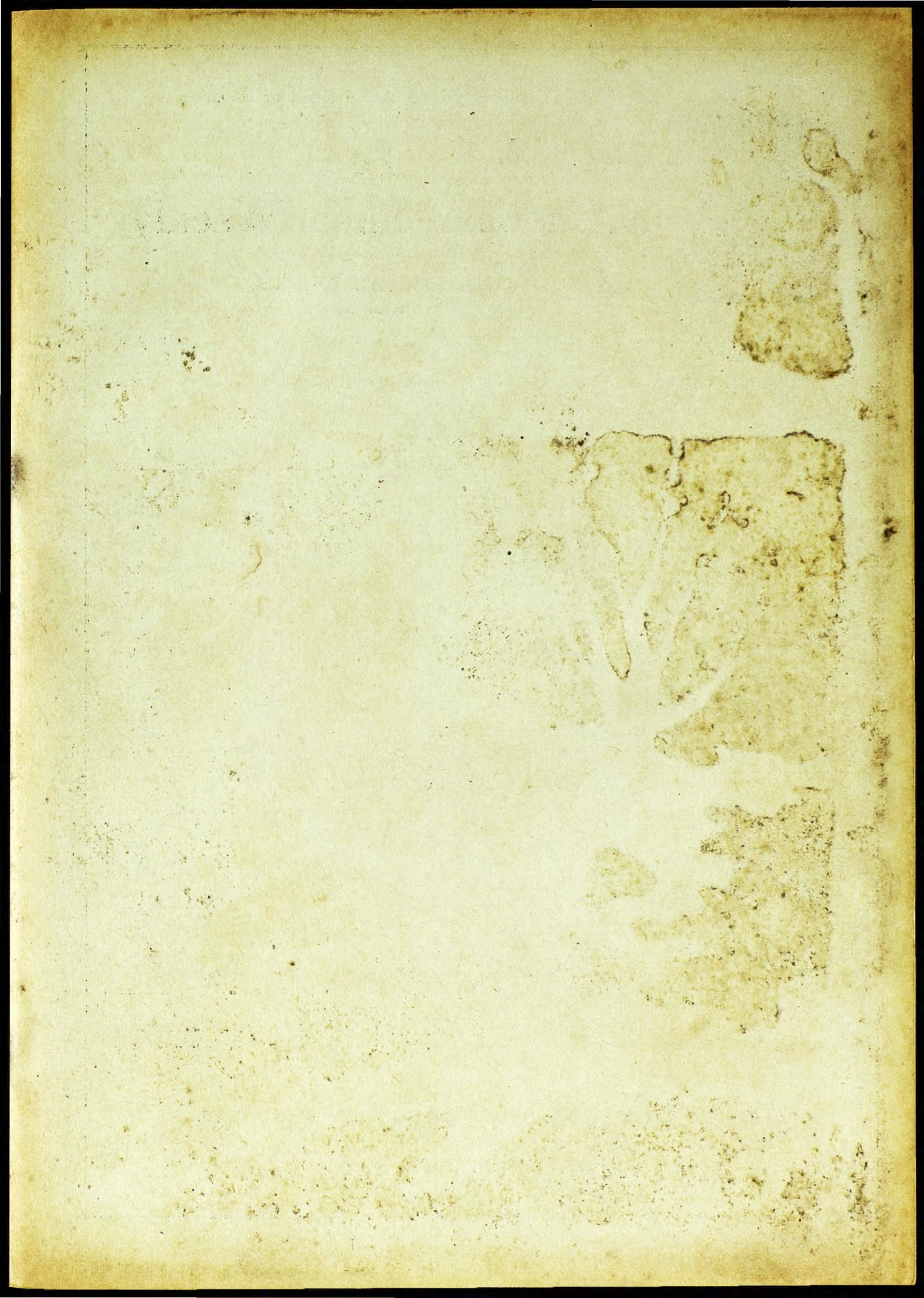
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| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR |or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
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